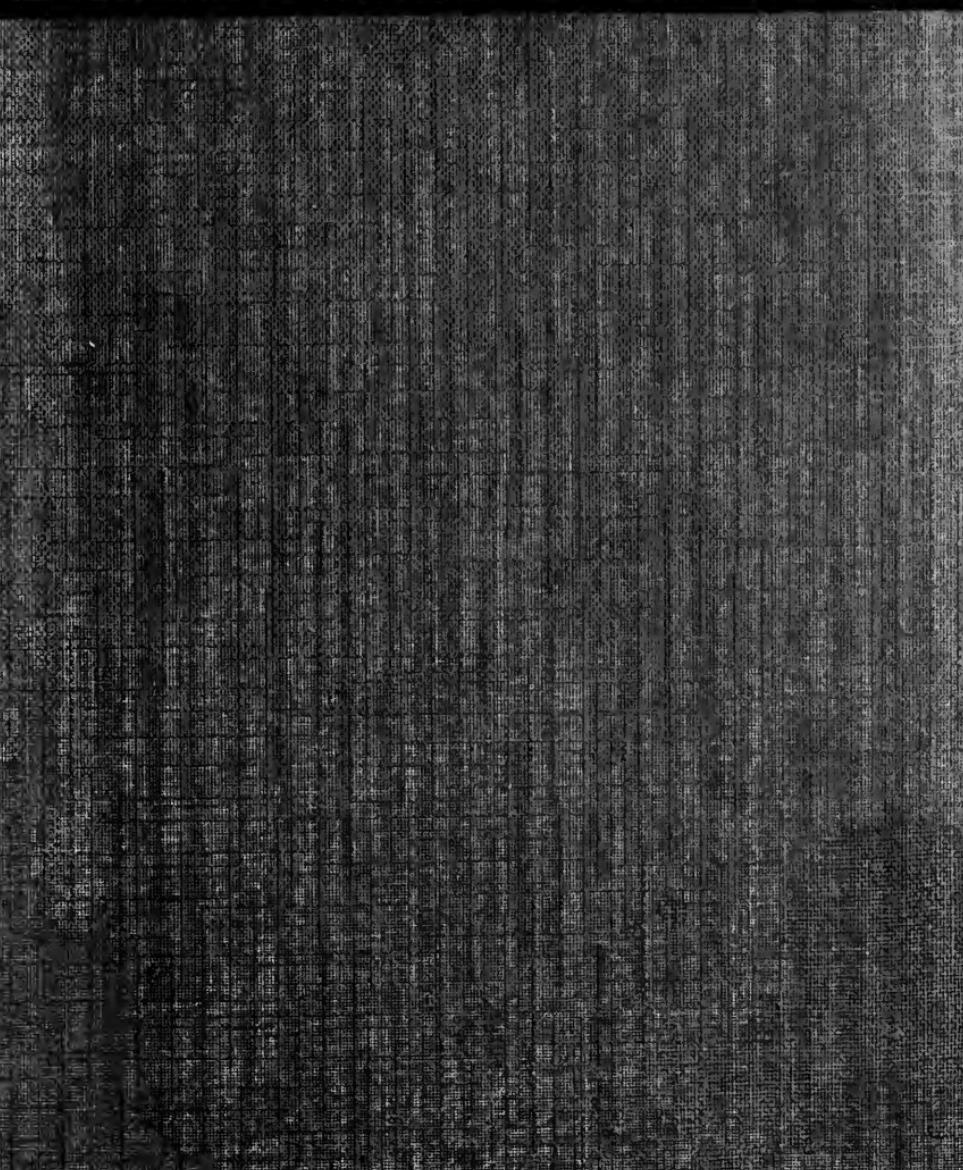


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# **Mockery**

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# Mockery

## A Tale of Deceptions

By

Alexander Macfarlan

"Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words : for from it all perdition took its beginning."  
—Tob. iv.



London  
William Heinemann

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN 1918.

TO  
MY FATHER,  
WHO LIKES ADVENTURES,  
THIS BOOK IS  
AFFECTIONATELY AND RESPECTFULLY  
DEDICATED



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## PROLOGUE

### THE VAN

# I

LEENESS-ON-SOLWAY, quaintest village of a district where everything is quaint and slow and somewhat harsh and very primitive, passed imperceptibly from a sleepy day to a yet sleepier evening. Its winding cobbled streets had some time ceased to echo to the last cart lurching homeward from the fields. A summer breeze from the frith stirred the tree-tops in the Rectory garden, and provoked the colony of rooks to dispirited protest. The June sun lengthened and deepened the shadows. And the air was full of the scent of lilac and the droning hum of bees. And down the centre of the principal street tramped two men, bearing between them a small American organ cased in shiny oil-cloth.

One of the men was middle-aged and was dressed in brown. The other was young and was dressed in black. The middle-aged man plodded—a trifle wearily, perhaps; he was a palish, thinnish man with high cheekbones, fair hair, and a face devoid certainly of all expression, yet suggestive somehow of a hidden sense of wry and melancholy humour. The young man marched; he was tall and dark and rather good-looking, defiant yet self-conscious, possibly a trifle pedantic, more than a trifle smug; he had the air of one who is perpetually being shocked by astounding revelations, and who relishes being shocked; he might conceivably become

unctuous and tedious as he grew older. Yet for this latent possibility he atoned by a pair of genuine fanatic's eyes, sombre, kindling, determined eyes which gripped and held you. Fanatic's eyes—that in particular is the characteristic to remember about this young man. You could tell by his eyes that he was a man who took himself and his business soberly and very seriously. So while his companion swung doggedly forward, hardly conscious of the American organ, he walked reverently, he walked exultingly, as though upon a sacred mission, bringing to his task his whole heart and soul, making, as it were, a symbol of the organ . . .

Both the men were shabby yet compelling, and both their faces were stamped with a kind of elusive mistrusting ferocity which was vaguely suggestive of Orangemen, freemasons, anarchists, secret societies, or something of the kind. Both of them, too, had a certain air of dignity about them—not the dignity which breeding or education can give, but rather that which comes from continuous living before the public eye. Perhaps restraint is a better way of describing it. You could easily fancy the pair as undertakers, second-rate actors, auctioneer's clerks, or well-trained servants. Or they might have been the discharged assistants of some very superior West-End tailor. Or they might have been professional singers in some large city choir. Anyway, nothing could have been more out of harmony with the slow and rustic atmosphere of North-West Cumberland in summer than these two men, as they bore an American organ down the village street like two inexorable servants of Fate bent upon the fulfilment of one of Fate's decrees.

They passed indifferently the King's Arms Hotel,

passed indifferently the adjoining seventeenth-century barn with most of its thick walls still intact, passed—still indifferently—the combined post-office and confectionery and tobacconist, rounded the corner of the doctor's house, and came upon the frith. They lowered their burden by mutual consent, and the middle-aged man wiped his forehead appreciatively with a scarlet cotton handkerchief, and the young man lifted his bowler hat and allowed what wind there was to ruffle his rather long hair.

Between Scotland and England the Solway flowed like a tongue of liquid silver. The Scottish coast was very clear on this particular evening, with its yellow sandbanks in the foreground and behind them the houses of Annan, which clustered among the trees and were backed by the distant Galloway hills. Here and there a window winked fitfully and brightly as it reflected the setting sun. The kitchen smoke from one outlying cottage rose straight into the air and contrasted sharply with the blue sky. A trail of white smoke moving rapidly along the coast marked the progress of an express bound for Carlisle. Everything seemed somehow very orderly and spacious, as a pleasant rolling country viewed across the water always does.

The English coast began with a broad sloping stretch of wet and sparkling sand, far out upon which a fisherman was staking invisible salmon nets with awkward and apparently superfluous movements. Next came a width of coarse meadow, growing in tufts. Next came a straight flat road unfenced towards the frith. And these three boundaries of the coast stretched away from the village as far as the eye could see till they reached the neighbouring village of Port Carlisle, some

mile and a half distant. In fact, they rather resembled three parallel bands of different width—light yellow, dirty green, and chalk grey. . . .

It is hard, in such a rustic environment, to see the practical use of a small American organ cased in shiny oil-cloth.

But just outside the village the meadow had been tramped into a plateau and a semblance of orderliness, and served as a sort of common or village green. Up and down England and Scotland you will find scores of such places, which unborn future generations will doubtless ascribe to the prevailing religious rites of the times. Yet the true explanation of their existence is far more simple. Despite all assertions to the contrary, mankind is essentially gregarious and has ever felt the need of combined speech and action, and thus the cities build polytechnics and athenæums, the towns town-halls, while the villages resort to the simple method of selecting a suitable piece of ground, tramping it into such a shape as suits their purpose, and annexing it by right of use. On this piece of ground they wash their dirty linen, hold indignation and revival meetings, welcome the rare advent of a circus, and discuss their superiors. Perhaps in very modern days the parish room is rather usurping the functions of the village green—the village of Leeness-on-Solway, for example, had a parish room very new and very stuffy. Yet even the latest thing in parish rooms is scarcely suitable for circuses or the drying of clothes. And so in many places the village green still survives, and the rights and privileges attaching to it are the source of interest to antiquarians, and of revenue to those lawyers who are called in to adjust disputes between the villagers and the vicar or local squire.

It was, then, the village green that the middle-aged man and the young man beheld as they lowered their eyes from the Scottish coast to what was immediately in front of them. Moreover, the green was occupied, for the public were there, represented by two old men and five children. And what was attracting them was a large dingy van standing at a corner of the green.

The front of the van faced across the frith, and there was no horse to it. The back of the van let down so as to form a platform, and commanded the whole of the green and the road beyond it. The interior of the van was shut off from publicity by a torn green curtain. And the sides and shafts of the van were dirty yellow, somewhat splashed. Yet very little of the sides could be seen, for they were both almost completely obliterated by two posters done in white and scarlet. One of these posters bore the legend : *Let there be light!* While the other made the following remarkable assertion : *Romanism ignorantly teaches that Mary is God!* Dissatisfied, perhaps, either with his right to issue orders in so uncompromising a fashion or with the accuracy of the remarkable information which he offered to the world, the author of these posters had made a final expression of his aims which at least expressed them honestly. Down the roof of the van, like the abbreviated knife-board of an omnibus, ran a white cloth pennon, and on either side of this was printed in larger black letters : *No Popery.* This, then, gives the key to the entire situation. Travelling lecturers were that evening to hold a No-Popery meeting in the pleasant village of Leeness-on-Solway, and two of the lecturers were bringing a portable organ to the meeting, since many—very many—hymns were to be sung.

## II

Beside the van were two more men, one of whom expressed his joy at the American organ's arrival by a perfect pantomime of gesture ending in a lively dance. The other was apparently wrapped in thought, and leaned against the van staring across the road at the distant Cumberland hills as though in a trance. The man who had danced attempted to rouse him, shaking him by the arm, and obviously calling his attention to the pair with the organ. Then he turned abruptly away and shouted loudly.

"Hi! Hi! Grant!" he shouted. "Deadly-Earnest Grant! Deadly! Didily-idily!"

Grant, that was the name of the young man who had taken so seriously his business of carrying the organ. John Horton Grant, nicknamed by the other lecturers Deadly-Earnest Grant because the world and its affairs always presented themselves to him in so grave and sober a light. And his fellow-porter's name was Hope, and the name of the man who had danced was Woolworth, and the man who had been in the trance was Ted Hawkins. Hawkins, Hope, and Grant (in strict order of seniority) were attached definitely to the van, and Woolworth was not, properly speaking, one of them. He was the agent whose business it was to visit towns and villages in advance of the van, scatter literature, find the right side of the local authorities, arrange accommodation, arouse public interest. He travelled, usually by rail, some three days ahead of his companions. Yet, being a sociable fellow, very fond of his own voice and full of high spirits, he often hurried his business over and went back to the van—"to have a

look at the show," as he expressed it. This was such a visit.

As Grant and Hope picked up the organ once more and advanced across the soft turf towards the van, Woolworth came to meet them. He now appeared as a little beaming, good-looking Englishman of about thirty, with glossy black hair and a boisterous manner. He was wearing a natty blue suit and a bowler hat pushed far back upon his head. He was not impressive and was decidedly vulgar.

"Evening, boys," he greeted. "Isn't it cold to-night—oh no, I don't think? I came over by bicycle, and the road was as hot as mustard! I felt like a bottle of Bass at every bloody pub, I can tell you." Then, becoming more facetious: "Hello, Grant! why didn't you answer me when I shouted just now—old Stick-in-the-mud? Hello, Hope?"

"How did you get on?" asked Hope.

"Oh, not so bad. Considering all things, not so bad at all. How are you doing?"

"Fair," said Hope. "I think we'll do fairly well, thanks to your billing. Where have you been to-day?"

"Kirkedward I've been to," Woolworth began to explode with reminiscent laughter. "Kirkedward," he went on, "and that's where the blooming joke comes in. Parson there, he thinks himself a bit of a nut. Thinks he's a bit high, he does. Vestments—all that. Well, after business was done with I thought I'd like to run over here—just to have a look at the show, you know—but I couldn't raise a bicycle in the whole place. Not a bike for hire anywhere. Trains rotten, of course. Well, at last I went to the parson, for I'd heard he had got a bike. 'Will you lend me your bike, sir?' I says. 'I want to visit my friends to-night at Leeness, and I

'swear I'll bring it back by eleven o'clock. There's my card,' I says. Well, of course he wouldn't, but instead of lending me the bicycle he looks at my card and starts in to jaw me about the harm our lectures are doing to the country. I told him some of the best illustrations we used, and that made him a bit worse. He started in to prove they were all wrong. Well, of course I listened most respectfully. 'Yes, sir,' 'No, sir,' 'Think so, sir?'—all that. And presently what do you think he did? I'm blessed if he didn't think he was converting me, and start to beg me to take his bike and run over here and stop you from using these particular illustrations in your speeches to-night. Begged me to take it, he did! Jolly well begged me to take it!"

Hope smiled sourly, and Woolworth burst into a roar of laughter at his own anecdote. Only Grant was silent, and Woolworth perceived this.

"Grant doesn't see anything funny in what I've just said," he said. "Grant thinks I'm off my nut a bit. Don't you, Grant?"

Grant's lips tightened.

"I think you should keep to business, which is your affair," he said. "Yes, I do! What do you know about the illustrations I use in my speeches?" Woolworth's eyes narrowed, and he thrust his head forward in an ugly fashion.

"Getting to think a lot of yourself?" he said. "Aren't you? Look here, Mr. Deadly-Earnest Grant, do I know my job or do I not?"

"You don't belong to the League. Not properly. They only pay you to be our agent."

Woolworth sneered.

"I see. Well, will you kindly have the goodness to answer me my question. Do I know my business

or do I not? I've been on the road ever since I left school. I've travelled for Finch's of Manchester. I may say that I've even had previous experience of this sort of work. Now, do I know my job or do I not?"

Grant ignored the question.

"You shouldn't have let the parson say that our information was false," he said obstinately. "You know perfectly well that every story, absolutely every story or scandal we make use of, is guaranteed by the League."

"Otherwise you wouldn't use it, eh?"

"I wouldn't use it."

Hope spat contemptuously upon the grass.

"A regular terror for the truth—I don't think." He went on quickly before Grant had time to protest. "Then what about that hotel in Bradford where the haughty good-looking chap asked you in the lounge if you didn't think it was a scandal that a decent hotel like that should receive no-account people such as travelling lecturers—meaning us? You were silent, you didn't correct his mistake. You led him to suppose you'd got nothing whatever to do with us."

Grant flushed darkly.

"I—I didn't intend," he stammered. "That is, I meant——"

He broke off as he saw that denial was perfectly useless.

"Cad!" he concluded vindictively.

Woolworth was about to reply heatedly, but a rapid half-warning glance from Hope made him change his mind. He fell back upon his old manner.

"Good old Deadly," he observed derisively. "You know, you take life much too seriously, that's what you do. One of these fine days you'll bust if you don't

look slippy, that's what'll happen to you. Down there, boys. This side of the van. Away from the wind."

He broke off sharply to superintend the placing of the organ, for by now they had all three reached the van. And he did not begin again. Something or the other he must suddenly have remembered, for his brow puckered absently and he helped in silence to remove the organ's protecting oil-cloth. Then he took Hope by the arm and drew him to one side.

"I want to speak to Hope," he explained.

Thus Grant was left alone with Ted Hawkins, the fourth member of the band, who was still leaning against the van and still staring at the distant hills as though in a trance. He was a little, fat, bald-headed man of between fifty and sixty, with a short, thick, down-drooping, fair moustache streaked with grey and rather wet at the ends. His blue eyes were mournful and sentimental. He held himself very erect, so that his stomach distended in front of him like that of a popular tenor just about to sing. His hands were short and podgy. The fingers tapped nervously against the side of his coat.

Presently he managed to rouse himself, produced a short black briar pipe which was already filled, lit it, and through the blue drifting smoke regarded with satisfaction Grant, who was still busying himself over the position of the organ.

"John," he called him in a soft, artificially emotional voice.

Grant left what he was about and came to him.

"I think we shall have a great meeting, a fine meeting to-night," said Grant confidently. "I feel it."

Hawkins eagerly lowered his pipe.

"I was just thinking the same," he exclaimed. "My,

we'll give it them straight, won't we—if they do come? John, we—we'll tell them off! I was wondering. We might have some extra speeches. Extra speeches, what do you think?"

Grant pondered this gravely. Then:

"Or hymns," he amended.

And at this Hawkins's face fell.

"Hymns draw," he conceded. "Hymns draw them and rouse them, so to speak. Yes, John, you're right. There is no doubt about that. But the—the speeches!" His eyes began to sparkle. "To see them shoving and pushing to get nearer! To feel that you're holding them and waking them, forcing them to listen to you! There's the crowd there, so to speak, and there's you on a platform above them. The singing stops and you stand up facing them. Some of them start to go and the rest begin to wriggle about. And then you start speaking and get more and more—away, you know"—he gestured vaguely—"till at last they're all listening to you breathless. Every one of them! John, it—it's all the personality of the man. Some men must get a hearing; it—it isn't fair to keep them down. The public need personality—you know."

"Always providing the cause they speak for is just," said Grant—warily, for he still smarted from the memory of Woolworth's exposure.

"Eh?" said Hawkins vaguely. Then: "Of course, of course! But I was talking about the speeches, John—more in particular."

## III

At this moment Hope and Woolworth returned, the former as usual, the latter still abstracted.

"They're beginning," said Hope, nodding in the direction of the doctor's house, round the corner of which several diffident villagers had appeared, talking animatedly.

"It's strange," reflected Grant as he looked at them. "I think it's very strange how slow most people are to come and listen to the truth."

"Oh, they'll come nearer presently," Hope soothed him. "They're pretty much like a lot of oxen. They've got to go cautious and snuff about before they come close—like those young oxen who upset the van near Cambridge last year."

Woolworth had been fidgeting impatiently.

"Well, I blooming well hope this little lot doesn't upset the van," he cut in. "What do you say, Grant?"

"I hope they don't."

"That's right. Going to knock 'em all properly this evening."

"I'm going to do what I usually do—tell them the truth."

"Right again. If a mere outsider may offer a suggestion, I should like to suggest that you chaps compare notes a bit more than you've been doing. You know, you want to give 'em something fresh each time. You don't want to have each of your speeches just the same as the one before it."

"I've never noticed that," said Grant coldly.

Woolworth went on :

"I should fancy you wouldn't. Its just one of these little things the person listening notices and the person

speaking doesn't. It was the stories you used, the stories you used by way of illustration that I had principally in my mind."

"I tell you I haven't noticed it," said Grant. "Any-way, in my opinion you can't tell people the truth too often."

"All the same, Grant," Hope put in, "there's maybe something in what Woolworth says. We've ten minutes yet. Let's see what we're going to say to them."

Grant shrugged indifferently, and after a moment Hope turned to Hawkins, who had again relapsed into his rather melancholy trance.

"Hawkins?" he began diffidently.

"Oh, Hawkins is all right," said Woolworth. "He speaks as the spirit moves him, and always will. Leave Ted Hawkins alone."

"Well—"

Hope spoke hesitatingly, and glanced at Woolworth, who put in briskly,

"It's between you and Grant, Hope. Grant first, if it's all the same. What illustrations are you giving them to-night, Grant?"

Grant replied in a slightly superior tone, not troubling to turn, but throwing his words over his shoulder.

"Maria Monk," he said. "The Holy Donkey. Borgia. The Woman-Pope. Rogers case. One or two others."

"Rogers case, eh?" Woolworth and Hope exchanged imperceptible glances, then the former went on: "Well, Hope had better keep off all these, right off them."

"There's plenty of others," said Grant. "Many others just as true."

"That's right," agreed Woolworth eagerly. "And

since that's right, Grant, it seems to me you might vary a bit now and then. The lot you mentioned just now, I take it that's the lot you're in the habit of using every time. Well, why not vary a bit to-night? Leave out, avoid all mention of the Rogers case, and give them something new instead."

"The Rogers case," said Grant, frowning.

"Well, why not?" Woolworth replied.

Grant shook his head emphatically.

"I shouldn't dream of doing that," he said shortly.

"Why not?" Woolworth repeated.

"I'm not going to. I consider that anecdote one of the most effective parts of my speech."

"It would be more effective, I should imagine, if you could tell it about some blooming monastery."

"Perhaps. But it just happens it wouldn't be true then. As it stands it's true, and therefore I shall tell it. That's what I'm here for."

Woolworth pondered this for a moment, and before he could speak Hope broke in:

"All the same, Grant, you might as well leave it out to-night if Woolworth thinks it best."

"No," said Grant—a trifle sullenly this time.

"Leave it out," Hope repeated.

"You cut it out, Deadly," Woolworth advised. But at this Grant only lost his temper.

"I tell you, no," he said. Then, turning directly upon Woolworth: "You call me Deadly-Earnest Grant. You think it's clever to taunt me because I'm in deadly earnest about this. Well, I am in deadly earnest! You others can believe what you like, but I'm in deadly earnest—like the League which I have the—the honour of representing. You know that the League is the real thing. You know that it speaks the truth and nothing

but the truth, and pays me to speak the truth for it. The League gives me certain stories to use, to illustrate the truth of what it says. These stories are all vouched for by the League. And I'm going to tell them to-night. Do you think I could go on like this for a thing that wasn't true? I couldn't—not for a day I couldn't. Yes. You do think so. You think I'm deceiving everybody. But I can't be living a lie! For I myself believe it."

"Perhaps you're deceiving yourself as well," Hope began diffidently. But this significant remark was wasted upon Grant.

"No; wait a minute. This Rogers case, it's one of the most effective stories we've got, and I can tell it better than either Hope or Mr. Hawkins—you know that. Do you remember that village near Derwentwater, when I roused them to—to such a pitch that they all refused to work for the Papist farmer? It was my telling of the Rogers case that did it. And the other time when we called for volunteers to break up the Papists' meeting? It was only after I had told them the full details of the Rogers case that we got them. No; I won't give up the Rogers case to-night; I won't cut it out! I'll tell you what it is! You—you're both jealous of me, Hope and Woolworth—Woolworth especially. You're jealous of my—my powers, my great gift——"

He broke off inarticulate, and a scene seemed inevitable, for Woolworth had started forward in the same ugly spirit he had previously shown. But, fortunately enough, Ted Hawkins at this moment created a diversion by jerking from his pocket a huge green handkerchief in which he buried his entire face. And Woolworth noticed it.

"Look at Ted Hawkins!" he exclaimed, pointing. "Ted Hawkins is using his blooming handkerchief; he's—he's bumming like a nipper!"

"Speaks: he speaks in a manner born to it," said Hawkins, his voice muffled within the handkerchief and his fat shoulders heaving with emotion. "Beautiful. It's all the personality of the—the man."

Hope prevented a further scene with a rare presence of mind.

"There's quite a crowd now," he remarked in a business-like voice. "Hawkins, will you get them started singing? And then speak to them. You make the first speech."

At once Hawkins put his handkerchief in his pocket, and, moving slowly to the American organ, bowed impressively to the gaping villagers, sat down at the organ, and cleared his throat noisily.

Hope glanced perplexedly at Woolworth.

"Oh, leave him alone," said the latter contemptuously. "Let him talk about Rogers and his iniquities all the blooming night, if he wants to."

"Isn't it—a bit risky, though?" asked Hope in a low voice.

But Woolworth shook his head.

"We'll chance it," he said. "It was just to be on the safe side. But old Rogers lives across the water there, and it's a million to one he's never even seen this village."

"Grant," called Hope softly, raising his voice, however.

But a few paces off, with folded arms and a rapt, intent expression, Grant was standing motionless. He suggested somehow a war-horse scenting battle ahead. He did not hear Hope speaking. . . .

He was listening to the villagers, who were singing under Ted Hawkins's leadership, with ever-increasing volume :

" Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Doth his successive journeys run ;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

" People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on His love with sweetest song,  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on His Name.

" Blessings abound where'er He reigns ;  
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;  
The weary find eternal rest,  
And all the sons of want are blest.

" Let every creature rise and bring  
Peculiar honours to our King ;  
Angels descend with songs again,  
And earth repeat the loud Amen."



# BOOK I

## DEADLY-EARNEST GRANT

### CHAPTER I

#### WHY GRANT ALWAYS LOOKED DEFIANT

##### I

GRANT always looked defiant, and the reason for this involves a certain amount of retrospect. His profession alone might not, perhaps, have rendered this defiance of his so marked. The fact was that half unconsciously he was always challenging the world, guarding his private affairs from the world's curiosity. There was a certain incident which he never forgot; there had been a time in the long past when the cold stars had glittered dispassionately above him, and had seen him humbled. He could not forget—as a man cannot forget who has once been blinded by the dazzling awfulness of truth. . . .

John Horton Grant resulted from an indiscretion of the Honourable John Grant, who was the younger son of an impoverished Scottish peer and a man of no occupation. At least, convention demands that he should be called a man of no occupation. But more strictly he was a man whose occupation had disappointed him, for a selfish aunt had monopolised his entire youth, choosing him as her attendant out of six eager nephews, and letting him suppose that she regarded him as her heir. He had contributed twenty-one years of his life to her service, and these years were

the years of his prime. She died, and he found himself rewarded by a farcical legacy that barely exceeded six thousand pounds. It was his first experience of the world's injustice. Each of the other five nephews received double that amount.

None the less, six thousand pounds is not to be despised by a little, unpractical, and rather shy bachelor of forty-two, who has been born in a crumbling Highland castle, who has lived and learned and grown to manhood only in that castle, who neither smokes nor drinks, who shrinks from publicity and display of every kind as he would from a mortal sin—and such a man was John Grant. He was possessed, too, of a certain quaint and ingenuous fatalism. Thus, after a few helpless futile months, months spent in troubled brooding, in gentle amazement at the cruel and unprovoked injury his aunt had done to him, in vainly striving to reconcile what had happened with his previous opinion of mankind, he realised finally that a door in his life had closed behind him, and that there was no going back. His brooding merely exhausted him, and his aunt, unjust or not, had at least left him enough for his simple wants. He took rooms in Edinburgh, in Alva Street. He joined the most restful of the restful Princes Street clubs. He settled down to such a life; this ageing, disappointed, diffident man of forty-two, who had never known love, who had never known comfort, who was helplessly facing the world for the first time, tempting the world to sport with him by his very helplessness.

His rooms he rented from a widow, by name Mrs. Horton, and she had a daughter Isabel who was of pure English extraction, a rare type in these days of intermarriage. She was tall, fair of hair, and her eyes were a cornflower blue. From beneath long lashes they

opened widely upon the world, through which she glided with a graceful indolence that was quite unconscious. She seemed to be always dreaming, like some frail hostage whose heart was in another country far away. After this description of her it may come as a shock to relate that she was born and brought up in Glasgow, where her parents had kept a second-rate boarding-house in Hill Street till her father's death had suggested a move to a quieter life in Edinburgh.

Such, however, was the case. An astounding but serene anomaly, she had grown up amidst the fogs, the grey tumbled roofs of the Hill Street flats, the unending procession of tawdry theatrical visitors, the rough, furtive give-and-take of the close-mouth. Perhaps, indeed, she owed some part of her English characteristics to these very surroundings, for no one is more English than your Englishman in Scotland, and thus a natural racial antagonism had driven her parents (both exiles from London) into each other's arms—as a relief, as it were, from the sober, hard-headed alien citizens with whom they were brought in contact. Sentimental old ladies, old Victorians, had noticed her as a child, and had given her many pennies—because her eyes “reminded them of another world.” And in due time those childlike, half-questioning eyes brought her more than pennies.

They brought her no less a personage than the Honourable John Grant, for his experiment as a bachelor of leisure, a man of no occupation, met with little success. To begin with, he was lonely, for he missed his aunt, dull as that spinster had been. A cynic is probably the type best adapted by nature for the part of an idle man. And poor John Grant was no cynic. And then, again, he was somewhat introspective. After dinner

he was prone to sit by the fire—instead of stepping briskly to his club and there making a fourth at whist—to sit by the fire and examine the state of his conscience, or the arguments for and against a future life, or even the fancied processes of his digestion; all of these are melancholy occupations for a simple bachelor, and all are equally dangerous. And, lastly, he was old-fashioned, and had conceived an eighteenth-century ideal of Edinburgh (from old books) that the nineteenth century could never satisfy. Deep within him somewhere there ran a hidden stream of chivalry that craved an outlet. Like so many middle-aged bachelors, he was secretly romantic.

Isabel Horton—glimpsed in passing with the kitchen as her background, like a lily growing in an ashpit; studied seriously after dinner as she removed the cloth like some tired priestess performing a ritual—she managed somehow to tap that stream of chivalry. He found himself thinking of her at all kinds of unexpected times, but most of all as a solace when the things of the world hurt him. His appetite failed him, and then his temper; he had never hitherto known that he had a temper. He began to be certain that she was unhappy, and privately dubbed her his “fairy princess.” And very soon he correctly diagnosed the cause of it all. Very soon, too, he set himself to please her with an old-fashioned courtesy and ceremony that was somehow terribly pathetic.

He sat in a deep armchair on a certain evening nearly two years from the time his aunt had died. One leg was doubled up beside him in a boyish way of his, and his chin rested on his neckcloth. And thus he puzzled over the problem life had become for him, and arrived at last at a satisfactory solution.

"You are growing old," he gravely told himself, "and, worse still, you are a man of the world. What right have you to invade her pure innocence? Better forget her."

At this point he came to an abrupt decision, wriggled his body into a more dignified posture, and flung out an arm impatiently. It almost completely encircled Isabel Horton, his "fairy princess," who had drifted unperceived into the room to clear off the remnants of his dinner. He sprang, blushing and full of apologies, to his feet.

"Miss Horton, I really—" he began, then broke off.

"My—my dear child," he attempted. Then more manfully : "Isabel, my dear child. My—my dear." Almost instinctively he opened his arms to her, and she yielded passively, pressing her lips to his, but saying never a word. In such a fashion did John Grant woo and win his bride. Thus was his problem solved for him. But the problem which will never be solved is whether Isabel Horton realised then that he meant honourable marriage, or whether . . .

Many landladies' daughters have yielded to the lodger's love-making, but not all of them have thereby gained a husband, or even expected to gain one. . . .

At any rate, in a wicked world full of uncharitable doubts it is pleasant here to look only at John Grant, whose intentions were beyond question, and whose inexperience in such matters was being proved by the awkwardness with which his knees were adapting themselves to a novel burden. True, he found his new privilege but a doubtful one, for Isabel Horton was a tall, heavy girl and he was little. But what of that? No schoolboy enjoys his first pipe. No woman is comfortable at the initial wearing of corsets. We learn

to delight in such practices because tradition says they are delightful. So do a few experimentalists, a few eccentrics, set the fashion of the world.

## II

The marriage was nearly three years old ere a child came to ratify it, and during these three years much water had run under the bridge. To begin with, Isabel Horton and not John Grant supplied the home—her mother's house in Alva Street—for with the marriage his total inability to deal with the world became more apparent than ever; sex is a queer thing, and reacts queerly upon different people. He had meant, of course, to take and furnish a house for his bride, and in the first pride of his betrothal he had started to interview estate agents. But he had got no farther than that, for he was racked by an agony of shyness, and all details of rent, leases, number of rooms, and so forth, stupefied him. They were simply incomprehensible to a man of his temperament.

And then the marriage itself was a distinct failure. The fact was, Isabel Horton was as useless as he for all practical purposes, though for a different reason; for while he could not bring his mind to grapple with problems of bread-and-butter, she would not bring hers. He regarded business as a mystery, she as a nuisance. Her brain, moreover, was completely turned by the prospect of an alliance with a man of his family. Indeed, she grumbled openly because she was denied the conventional opportunities of the titled—powdered footmen, French maids, motor-cars, castles, and the like. She complained bitterly because she could not share with him his honorary title, and it was only with the

greatest difficulty that he restrained her from creating a unique precedent in this matter !

And he found out but too soon that if she were a "fairy princess," at least her relatives and friends were indisputably mortal. The torment from these was a torment new to John Grant, who had enjoyed the advantages of decent society all his life as a matter of course. His mother-in-law became to him like the terrible mother-in-law of the cheaper comic papers, a nightmare—worse than that, something that haunted him by day as well. Her death occurred during the first seven months of the marriage, and it is not extravagant to say in all seriousness that perhaps it saved him from murdering her. But even after her death more distant relatives remained—vulgar, giggling, intriguing cousins from Paisley ; a horrible fat old aunt with a fondness for strong tea and onions, and a habit of picking her nose. And then there were friends. It had never even occurred to him that his pale golden-haired princess, his "fairy princess," might have such friends. Terrible, impossible people they were, too—for him. There was a common little music-hall comedian bedecked with cheap jewellery, who called whenever he was in Edinburgh, to "have a squint at little Isa." There was a wealthy middle-aged tailor named Wilson (with a purple mottled face) who sat long, spoke seldom, sneered uncomfortably at everything, and used disgusting language with a quiet relish that rendered it more disgusting still. And there was a stout, vivacious young Jewess who talked incessant scandal. You can easily picture for yourself the sort of thing he had continually to endure.

And in three years he had lost all his money ; his pitiful little legacy of six thousand pounds was gone.

New dresses, absurdly lavish entertainments, incessant music-hall parties, expensive trinkets—these began the trouble. The Grants should have lived at the rate of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. His capital invested brought him slightly more than that amount. But at the end of their first year his banker, in a friendly mood, showed him that eleven hundred pounds had been spent. Something had to be done, and out of many possible courses John Grant chose to better his fortunes by speculation.

He had not, however, a solitary idea about speculation. It is improbable that he could have been trusted to buy Consols without hashing the affair. He fell a victim to the glamour of the first well-written prospectus that the post brought him. And the prospectus in question happened to be that of Molopo Diamonds, Limited.

He invested three thousand pounds with this company—at thirty-three per cent. And then almost at once his heart failed him terribly, and he resolved to visit the mines in person, “to see thoroughly how things stood.” His wife encouraged him in this preposterous madness. He placed a thousand pounds to her credit, and with the remaining nine hundred—the last of his fortune, you will observe—he bought a ticket for Cape Town and a money belt in which to keep what remained. He sailed from Plymouth, and the unknown swallowed him up for two long years, years of indescribable suffering for him, since the mine, of course, did not exist, and if it had existed would have been situated somewhere in the heart of the Kalahiri Desert.

Towards the close of these two years good news—the first good news he had ever in his life received—reached him from home in the shape of a letter from

his wife. It was full of explanations and excuses for her long silence, and the tone of it was far more reasonable and affectionate than any he had yet known her use. But in the light of its contents its mere tone was as nothing. It contained two astounding items of information—first that eight months after his departure a child had been born; second, that his wife had inherited a small annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds, and was anxious to start afresh upon that if he would come home to her.

The news stunned him slightly. He saw himself impartially perhaps for the first time, and realised how unsuited he was for dealing with the world, how hopeless was his struggle to earn a living. He disliked the thought of living upon his wife, but after all (he reflected in his simplicity) the thing had been done before. By this time a steady yearly hundred and fifty pounds seemed like moderate wealth to him, so precarious had his finances become. He despatched a cable almost without hesitation, and secured a second-class ticket for the next boat.

And in Edinburgh the baby awaited him, casting a spell upon him or ever his train had reached Waverley Station, turning the small Alva Street house into a palace of mystery. In the stuffy bedroom whither his wife had led him he saw it at last, and stood reverently before it, as other men wiser than he had stood before another Child in the long ago. He gazed so strangely, so seriously upon it that in the end his wife grew nervous and plucked him by the sleeve gently.

"What are you thinking about, Jack?" she murmured. He started, and raised his eyes timidly to hers.

"I was only thinking," he said, "that he must take after the Grant side. He's so awfully dark, don't you

'think? I'm not dark, of course. But my grandfather—no, I mean my great-grandfather——"

Much to his surprise, she kissed him suddenly and thus checked his reminiscences.

"His name's John Horton Grant," she said quite inconsequentially.

### III

But these intimate details, of course, were never fully known to young John Grant. His earliest recollections were of Edinburgh, where he lived till he was nine years old. Exceptionally soon in life he became thoroughly aware that the house to which he belonged was permanently divided against itself. He became imbued with the conviction that his father's family was something of which to be tremendously proud, senselessly proud, and that his mother's was a cause of shame, something that should be concealed as far as possible from the world.

It is merely ridiculous to accuse him of unnatural feelings towards his mother. She was entirely to blame for his state of mind, for she first created it and then fostered it by the extravagant airs she gave herself on the strength of being John Grant's wife. For, lucklessly enough, her chastened mood had not long survived her husband's return from Africa. It was as if it had been brought about only by a dread of that same return. Thus, it vanished whenever she found she had nothing to fear from her husband, whenever he turned out to be the same unworthy little man who had married her.

So life at Alva Street was resumed on much the same old lines, allowing always for the fact that they were now desperately poor, and so of necessity had to live within their income. Only Mrs. Grant's relatives came

regularly to see her. The stream of gossiping friends had ceased to flow; it merely trickled at rare intervals. Once, for example, the wealthy tailor Wilson called, and to him young John was duly exhibited, as he was to everyone who came. But already young John's taste had grown fastidious. He hated Wilson's coarse mottled face, with its heavy cheeks, and he screamed his hatred and had to be removed in disgrace. After that Wilson came no more for as long as they remained in Edinburgh.

If young John's pride had been vested in an ideal conception of his family to which it was his duty to live up, it might have been a source of blessing to him. But, young though he was, his was a complacent pride, the very worst sort of sinful pride, which tempted him rather to profess perfection, in the teeth of all the evidence of his wrong-doing which might be brought up against him. Somewhere—Heaven knows where—he had picked up the phrase: "The King can do no wrong." And though he never openly applied the phrase to his own case, it was but too easy to see that he considered it perfectly applicable. Thus he would lie glibly rather than admit that he had made a mistake.

"But of course," his father had patiently argued on one occasion—"of course you took the jam. We saw you take it. You mustn't tell a lie, you know, John."

But young John, aged seven, would not give in.

"Wasps! Wasps!" he shouted excitedly, dancing with vexation. "I only went to take out the wasps. I did, I did, I did! The wasps were eating it, and I went to—to kill them all."

And at this (for the month was November) his father had sighed drearily, foreseeing dimly, perhaps, some of the trouble that lay ahead.

None the less, young John had many very pleasant memories of his father. As he grew older they used to ramble together, exploring Edinburgh. They rambled down the High Street from St. Giles's to the Canongate. They would spend long hours among the twisted, harsh little streets that cluster about Holyrood. Blackford Hill and the Braid Hills knew them, and on fine summer mornings they would take the train to Duddingston and walk thence to Piershill around the base of Arthur's Seat. On several memorable occasions their wander-lust (assisted by the train) had even carried them to the Pentlands, and the wooded rolling country that lies around the village of Carlops. And there were always the Princes Street Gardens, and the busy, ceaseless trains which cut the gardens in two, and the romance of speculating whither the trains were going—Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow, Dundee, wonderful remote places. . . .

It was in the course of some of these excursions that young John learnt more of his father than years of mere passive residence with him could have taught. Child as he was, he managed to appreciate vaguely what a failure his gentle companion had been, what a quiet tragedy life had turned out for him. Once the boy happened to covet a flower which bloomed at the other side of a ditch.

"Father, do get it!" he called excitedly. "Jump over and get it, now!"

But rather sorrowfully the other shook his head.

"I can't jump," he explained. "I've tried to jump again and again, John, but I never manage somehow. And, John! The world doesn't like you if you can't jump."

And on another occasion, when they were walking

by Arthur's Seat, his father pointed suddenly at the overhanging crest and laughed nervously.

"Do you believe it, John," he then said, "I always have the idea that it will tumble on top of me. It's a stupid idea, I know. But—things like that have happened to me all my life."

This remark made a tremendous impression upon the child, for it was crudely explicit, and thus better within his grasp. He lay awake that night in a kind of horror, trying to imagine how terrible life would be—with Arthur's Seat always tumbling on top of you. . . .

But often enough his father was absurdly optimistic, full of preposterous dreams about the marvels he might still accomplish. He was not yet old—a few years past fifty—and on these occasions he would draw himself up and pluck at his short beard with a complacent air that would have been ridiculous had it not been pitiful.

"After all," he would say, with an appearance of weighing great issues in the balance—"after all, Garibaldi was fifty-three before they made him dictator of Sicily. You know, John, there's great opportunity in business for a man of my experience. I've really had some experience."

#### IV

Often enough, too, he would be attacked by the mood of meddling that is the inevitable cross of any active idle man, and then he would fuss about trifles and make a great display of putting the household affairs in order. At such a time, broken locks, or the kitchen range, or an alleged leakage at the gas meter, would all occupy his attention. But most of all he loved to worry about the business side of things.

"But look here, Isabel," he would argue with his wife,

"it's a piece of preposterous nonsense. They may be cheating you about your annuity. I ought to go thoroughly into the matter. Oh, and there's another thing. You've got John's birth certificate all right, I hope? I wish you'd let me see——"

But she never would let him see, choosing rather to shield him from all such business worries with an exemplary care that was rather astonishing in the light of her utter disregard for his comfort where other things were concerned. She banished the restless mood with a soothing smile, kisses, or (if these failed) a promise to go into the matter with him at some future date. And mercifully enough, the mood was not very frequent.

## V

For the sake of the boy's education, when he was nine years old they removed to the village of Shilling, which nestles on the borders of Perthshire, at the foot of the Ochil Hills.

Shilling is famous for its Academy, which can (and does) boast that it is one of the oldest public schools in Scotland. It is quite a big village, with a population of nearly two thousand souls. It has an Old and a New Town, the former built upon the slope of the hills and dominating, as is fit and proper, the latter. It contains many pleasant villas and cottages of a dark grey stone. A single line of railway from Alloa to Perth skirts the village, and crosses the River Kent by a rather noticeable viaduct. And beyond the railway lie the Kendale Braes, low wooded hills somewhat similar to the Sussex Downs.

The Academy is a severe ascetic building modelled vaguely after some Greek temple or the other, but it is

delightfully situated at the very foot of the hills, and stands in a large park plentifully stocked with trees. The whole of the New Town—and here, again, this is fit and proper—seems to lead up to and culminate in the Academy. For behind the Academy there are no more houses. Only the hills are its background.

It was the Academy, then, that brought the Grants to Shilling, for, like most of the Scottish schools, its fees were incredibly cheap, and there was no obligation for pupils to board, since the authorities, if anything, preferred them to live at home. For an annual rental of thirty pounds the Grants secured a semi-detached six-roomed house overlooking the distant railway and the Kendale Braes beyond. And in this new paradise young John proceeded to revel in a hundred new liberties and privileges, which he found sweet after the restrictions a city life had imposed. . . .

Even the best of Scottish public schools is more democratic than any provincial grammar school in England, and as Shilling Academy was bound by the terms of its foundation to accept free scholars under certain conditions, young John was plunged into a society that was sufficiently mixed. Yet, despite this fact, the society had its limitations. For instance, at the lowest stratum there were no pauper's children. The school's democracy stopped just short of that. And at the uppermost stratum there was no boy, except John Horton Grant, who came of a titled family. English influence had affected nearly all such families in Scotland, and they now preferred to fall into line with England and send their sons to Eton or Harrow.

The children of Colonial administrators, of retired officers from the Indian Army, of wealthy Scottish merchants, of the more successful doctors, the board-

school children who had shown signs of genius, the children of the neighbouring and the local tradespeople —these chiefly made up the society into which young John was plunged, though not until he had spent two years in a private preparatory school of the old sort, sustained by two delicious Victorian spinsters whom Dickens might have loved to caricature. Moreover, like all democracies, the school was a trifle snobbish. That is to say, although you might easily attend it and yet be the son of a cobbler, for that very reason you were apt to be secretly envied and openly admired if you happened to be the son of a peer. Young John was not the son of a peer. But he was the grandson of a peer, which was almost as good. He soon discovered what an asset this was, and then took care that the fact should be widely known.

Indeed, the temptation to do so was great, for it was his only asset. And a hint about his birth generally secured him the attention that another might have secured by a lucky pass on the football field, or by some bold feat in the gymnasium. But up to this point in his life his father had chosen to educate him in person, and thus he had never mixed with boys of his own age. And thus, too, he was easily exasperated, backward in daring, totally ignorant of all games (even of football and cricket), unable to assume that swagger of physical superiority which goes so far among boys. Of course, he might have learned the games, but any learner must first admit that he is ignorant, and young John, in his insane pride, still elected to profess perfection. The same spirit now prompted him that had prompted him years before when he was caught stealing jam to profess as his motive, not greed, but an altruistic concern for the jam. Thus he would not learn games, nor would

he even admit that he would not learn. He first shirked, then shielded his shirking by a plea of weak health which prevented him playing.

And both his parents were useless to him, for his father had grown more incapable than ever, and his mother had become a golden-haired enigma addicted to more face-powder than was really necessary. She seemed to look upon boys as a separate troublesome creation which should be fed, regarded with vacant perplexity, turned out into the street to look after itself, and then forgotten. She twice, as far as young John could ever remember—she twice only showed herself capable of great enthusiasms: once over the discovery of a wonderful new shampoo powder, and once over the game of bridge, which leaped into popularity about halfway through his schooldays.

Moreover, he had no reliable old friends upon whom he might fall back for counsel. Nearly everyone who linked them with the past was discouraged by Mrs. Grant, though not quite everyone; for Wilson, the coarse but wealthy tailor, developed a habit of running through from Edinburgh for the afternoon once a month, and sometimes more often. He had grown to be almost apoplectic by now, and the veins of his face were all lined out like purple threads. And Mr. Grant did not, and Mrs. Grant would not, and young John could not shake him off. And because of this young John not only endorsed his infantile prejudice against Wilson, but fanned it into a regular passion of hatred, for he feared lest the fellow's visits might detract from the glory that his father's ancestry brought him.

"I don't know why—why on earth we receive him," young John would say furiously. "It's dashed cheek his coming. I hate him!"

But at this Mrs. Grant would always grow pale with anger.

"You're a stupid boy," she would reply. "Be silent! You don't understand what you're saying."

And his father would sigh uneasily, fearing that he was about to be worried.

"Don't trouble about him," he would say appealingly. "I expect your mother's lonely, John. I daresay he means well, you know."

Thus time slipped by, and young John was in his last year of school before such a thing seemed possible. He had grown into a tall, good-looking lad, self-satisfied, conventional, and crude, pitifully crude.

## VI

One day Mrs. Grant had gone to Glasgow to visit her horrible aunt, and young John and his father had closed the house and had set out to walk to Quaker's Bridge, a small place five miles up the line, famous for a deep glen and an old bridge whence it took its name. It was a perfect day for a walk, one of those dry misty days of early spring with a sharp touch of frost in the air, with the pungent smell of the frost very strong, with the sun, like a glowing ball of fire, casting a ruby gleam upon everything.

For a long time they walked in silence, both thinking, perhaps, thoughts that were not so very different, only framed differently, and both noticing the rare passers-by, the rarer cottages, the sparrows scolding in the trees, only as pleasant but remote accompaniments to their thoughts. Then a very handsome motor brougham flashed suddenly past, breaking somehow the spell that had fallen upon them.

"How would you like a car like that?" asked Mr. Grant jestingly.

Young John thought he would like it immensely, so the other went on:

"It's rather funny," he half soliloquised, "but really the people nowadays who have cars would be much more at home walking. Nature didn't mean them to drive. They're not built that way. And it's just as true the other way round. So many people have to walk all their lives who would make such a good job of it if they were wealthy and all that. We Grants, now—we ought to have a car like the one that passed if birth means anything at all."

He paused, sighed, walked for a little in silence, then resumed:

"Family, John, is your only heritage—and I doubt you might be better without it. The Grants are as old as Scotland nearly. You'll find them mentioned all through history. It hasn't been much use to me, of course. But then I've been a failure all my life. Everything I've tried I've made a mess of. And now I'm reduced to living on my wife—your mother—and glad enough to do it, for I couldn't, I simply couldn't fend for myself nowadays. . . . I wonder why I'm talking to you like this, for of course you don't understand."

Absently he thrust a hand to his pocket, and immediately, as though by magic, his face cleared and his mood of despondency left him.

"Your mother's key," he exclaimed in triumph, withdrawing his hand. "I picked it up this morning and meant to give it her, but I forgot. Aha, John! now we'll surprise your mother! We'll know all her secrets by the time she comes back from Glasgow."

His face fell a trifle.

"But I forgot," he went on more soberly. "I'd have to disappoint you and turn back now. There's the papers about her annuity. And then there's your birth certificate—that's important. And a score of lesser affairs. It would take me all my time, and yet I really ought to see to it. Your mother puts off so. She's meant to go into all that with me for years now."

Again his face fell.

"You shall go on alone," he decided rapidly. "See, here's money for your ticket back. Don't be too late, though. And a shilling to get yourself some lemonade and things before you leave. You'll get along all right by yourself, won't you? You see what I mean?"

Again the restless mood was upon him, so young John found himself tramping ahead alone, bound for Quaker's Bridge, almost before his mind had had time to adjust itself to the prospect of this unexpected emancipation.

He had a glorious day of it. No matter how uneventful that day had been, he would have enjoyed it, for this was only the third occasion in his life that he had made such an expedition by himself. But as it chanced there was really plenty to occupy him, for the pine-woods through which he had to pass were filled with squirrels, rendered bold by hunger. And when at last his walk ended, there was the excitement of ordering refreshments from the young deferential proprietor of the little bungalow beside the station. And—most exciting episode of all—he sat so long over his queen-cakes and ginger ale that he missed his train and had to wait two hours for the next one. It was already growing dusk when he approached his home once more, and his heart thumped with guilty trepidation, for he knew that by

now his mother would have returned, and he feared her criticism of the escapade.

But no such criticism apparently awaited him, for quite unchallenged he softly closed the door and stood perplexedly in the hall, a boyish, hesitating figure. He was listening for the sound of his parent's voices, but the only sound that reached him was a curious irregular sobbing which came from the kitchen. He laid his hand upon the knob of the dining-room door and prepared to enter. And then suddenly a strange woman, a neighbour whom he knew only by sight, rushed upon him from the direction of the kitchen, and seized him by the wrist and dragged him back.

"You can't go in there," she panted rapidly. "Don't—don't go in there. Your father's had an accident with his razor. His throat . . . ."

## VII

He had heard the words perfectly, but it was almost a full minute before his outraged faculties could comprehend them, so he asked in a queer level voice:

"Why can't I go in there?"

Then, before there was time for an answer he understood, and he recoiled from that door and the sinister peace which lay behind it as though his touching it had been a symbolic act which had let loose upon his head some blind, irrevocable doom.

"You mean—you mean—" he muttered, shrinking inch by inch from the door.

The woman dared not say plainly what she meant.

"Come to your mother," she whispered. "Oh, come to your mother."

But he paid no heed to her.

"You mean——" he began afresh. "But it's—quite impossible. It's all—quite impossible. It's—too all of a sudden."

"Come to your mother," she repeated desperately. But he went on:

"It's all—quite impossible." A sudden bright hope lightened his darkness, and he dropped the miserable pretence that the dreadful thing was untrue. "Is he—he isn't dead?" he asked eagerly.

She nodded quickly, giving him one sidelong glance and then averting her head.

"Come to your mother," she repeated as before. "She needs you."

At this point he was swayed by some melodramatic instinct which he promptly and correctly classified, loathed, yet was not able to control. He staggered back against the wall and clapped a hand to his forehead. It was all deliberate acting upon the part of some unsuspected incurably egoistic person who lurked somewhere within his own familiar person, who leaped out of his hiding-place, taking advantage of the situation.

In a few seconds he recovered himself, and caught eagerly at the woman's suggestion because it was a normal one.

"Yes, I'll go to mother," he assented loosely.

So she pushed him to the kitchen door and then turned away.

"I'll have to get Dr. Strachie," she explained as she left him.

And he staggered into the kitchen as a man might stagger supposing he were plucked without warning from a comfortable stall and thrust straightway upon a lighted stage, and commanded to take part instantly in a drama that had concerned him hitherto only as

a spectator. He felt how impossible his task was, how inadequate he was to cope with it. And then he saw a dishevelled figure—the golden hair was matted and twisted—which crouched trembling by the coal-box, pressing its fingers to its eyes as though it would fain efface some nightmare impression which the eyes had just perceived. And then, with actual indignation, he realised that he was looking upon his mother. To him there was something profoundly shocking, something obscene in her utter abandonment, and he hastened to her side that he might end it.

"I say, mother," he began frantically.

But at his first touch she shrieked and fended him off with her hands.

"For heaven's sake," he began afresh.

But he stopped of his own accord. He was rendered speechless by the vacant horror which shone from the eyes she had just raised to his.

Suddenly, with feverish haste, she began to speak to him.

"He's lying there dead," she said in a quick level monotone. "Have you seen him yet? I found him like that when I came off the train—lying there dead. He's in the dining-room. The razor's still in his right hand. And his throat, his throat's as if a great red mouth had opened in it. His beard is stained—"

Her voice quavered abruptly into a shriek. He took a step toward her.

"Don't," he beseeched her, but she did not heed him.

"The carpet," she went on, "right across the new carpet—"

"I can't stand it, mother," he said sharply. And he took yet another step closer.

But again she would have none of him.

"Keep off, go away!" she screamed as before. "I won't have you touch me. I shan't look at you. I—I'd better follow him. I'd better follow him in the same way."

"But, mother," he protested.

But she only went on :

"I'd better follow him in the same way—the same way. Ah, it's a judgment upon me! It's all a judgment upon me! A clergyman would tell me it was a judgment. It's all a judgment. Oh, what a heart-broken, miserable woman——"

"Mother," he interrupted, almost hysterical by now, "I'll call the police. I'll fetch someone. I—I can't bear this—this——"

He perhaps might have left her here, but her grief for herself flashed momentarily into anger.

"You," she said looking at him with sudden shrewishness—"it's all through you it happened!"

He gasped at the injustice of her accusation, yet before he could answer it she had relapsed into her old complaint.

"Oh, what a heart-broken woman! What a wretched, miserable woman!"

"Look here," he decided, and his voice was shrill with excitement, "I'm not going to stand this, you know. The doctor's coming in a minute. Why, we'll both—both be accused of murder, if you're not able to explain anything. Is there any cause; was he—ill?"

She continued to rock herself in an ecstasy of grief. But she answered him.

"The papers," she wailed. "The papers killed him. You are the cause of it all."

Her answer was so much nonsense. He perceived in

a flash that the tragedy had turned her brain. He had fancied scarcely ten minutes before, when the tragedy of his father's suicide had first burst upon his intellect, that he had sounded the lowest depths of misery; but now he was faced with a tragedy still more hideous. In those pregnant moments he had learnt the terrible lesson that it is possible to suffer more and more and more again, that the sea of suffering is bottomless, and that thus it is impossible to place a limit upon its depth. He saw that he had a mad woman to deal with, yet, strangely enough, the knowledge braced him. He had nobody upon whom he might lean. The burden of the situation rested upon his shoulders alone.

So he pitifully tried to square his shoulders to meet it.

"You must tell me all about it," he said. "Quietly."

"You," she moaned in reply. "You—and the papers."

"Now, try again," he urged her. "You know, you must really tell me all about it. I—I must know. I'm not a child. I'm eighteen."

"You're not eighteen," she said. "You're seventeen."

He disregarded this further piece of nonsense, and recovered sufficient spirit to congratulate himself upon the tact with which he had refrained from contradicting her.

"Let's think," he went on. "The Grants wouldn't do a thing like—like what you said, unless there was some tremendous reason."

She laughed mirthlessly, and the sound of it jarred him, so that he forgot for a moment her mental condition.

"Well, they wouldn't!" he cried hotly. "I'm one of them, thank heaven, and so I ought to know. And you needn't laugh at me. It—it's horrible of you. I have a right to know about my father's death—"

"Your father isn't dead," she interrupted.

"I say, I have a right to know about my father's death."

"Your father isn't dead."

Something in the way she said this checked his eloquence. He had paid no attention to her when she first said it, for it had been exactly in keeping with the theory of her madness that he had recently conceived. But this was different, somehow. There was a ring of bitter conviction in her voice that brought conviction to the listener.

"Do you mean——" he whispered hoarsely.

She began fumbling for some papers that crinkled at her breast.

And then young John perceived that she was not mad, that some unthinkable news was about to be revealed to him. A couple of minutes earlier he had been actually sick at the bare thought of her madness, but now he would have given much could he only have been sure that her madness was indeed real.

He watched her drag, awkwardly, the papers from her corsage, but after that he could stand the suspense no longer, so he snatched them from her hand. He glanced through the papers. There was his birth certificate, which he did not then trouble to read. There were one or two letters, all from the same correspondent. There was an old cheque which had been badly torn, and the signature to the cheque was "James Wilson." In an instant he had a good notion of the truth, but before he could find words for it his mother had spoken.

"He—he wasn't your father," she sobbed, indicating the dining-room.

He only stared helplessly, so she went on :

"And you really are seventeen. I made him"—again she indicated the dining-room—"I made him think you were six months older than you were. And—and your father——"

"Who is my father?" he asked suddenly.

"Can't you guess?" she replied. "It wasn't long after he went to Africa. I was so lonely. And—and Mr. Wilson——"

An awful thought struck young John.

"Not Wilson the tailor?" he said. "Not that man I hate?"

He stood quivering for a moment, waiting for her contradiction as a parched desert wanderer might await a drop of water for which he had begged. Then, as he marked her nod of confirmation, his whole body grew limp, and he fell back against the wall, though this time there was no mistaking the spontaneity of the action. He understood every intricacy of the business as though it had all been explained to him. Does this seem too precocious for a boy of his years? You will not think so when you hear that his intellect had lately been stimulated at school by a course of Sophocles's tragedies.

Every phrase of hers that he had mentally registered as insane now became vested with a terrible sanity in the light of this new truth. He was indeed the real cause of the suicide. He was indeed seventeen, and not eighteen as he had supposed. His father was indeed still alive. It was all true, remorselessly true.

Yet he turned once more to the papers which he held, hoping persistently for some little door in the wall of evidence which surrounded him, some little door through which he might slip back to the pride of ancestry which had been his cherished besetting sin. There was none. His birth certificate (which he now read carefully) settled the question of his age. The letters and the torn cheque proved definitely that his mother had been left no annuity, but had derived her pittance only from

her lover Wilson. And this fact, too, accounted perfectly for the poor suicide in the dining-room. That helpless golden-haired man, from birth a potential suicide—he could not face life afresh, and he could not live as a willing cuckold upon the shameful earnings of his wife. . . .

As a man recovering from a faint becomes but slowly conscious of the sounds going on around him, so young John became at last aware of his mother's voice droning ceaselessly on.

"A heart-broken, miserable woman," she was saying. "If only I had burnt those papers it would have been all right. How mean of him to go and read my papers! While I was away. For he never would have known. It was such a dark baby, yet he never thought of the reason. It was so like Mr. Wilson——"

But with a strange inarticulate noise, like the cry of a wounded animal, young John broke from the room, consumed by shame and despair and mortally wounded pride. He pictured the dark, sneering, mottled face of the tailor Wilson. He pictured his own dark face, which he had madly believed to be somehow characteristic of the Grants. It was enough. He ran sobbing from the house into the night, which had fairly set in by now. . . .

The cold stars glittered dispassionately above him and saw his humiliation. . . .

He could not forget, as a man cannot forget who has once been blinded by the dazzling awfulness of truth. . . .

Yet in the bitterness of his pride he rebelled furiously against the Creator Who had let this thing happen to him. . . .

Like Lucifer, he refused to turn from his sin. . . .

So he left his boyhood behind him and set out upon his life with a great rebellion surging within his heart.

## CHAPTER II

### DISILLUSIONMENT OF GRANT

#### I

AND eight years later life had become for him an endless succession of small towns and villages, of crowded tilted faces lit by the fluttering naphtha lamps, of speeches made and heard, of petty triumphs, of reticent companions, of temporary trivial excitements. . . .

Suddenly he fainted. He had been standing perfectly motionless—sombrely in the shadow of the van, deeply stirred by the singing of a hymn, forbiddingly almost, with all the emotionalism that was in him agitated. Hope and Woolworth had been discussing in low voices how they should deal with his contumacy. Hope had called him, but in vain. They had dismissed him with a shrug—exchanged glances, perhaps. And then suddenly he fainted. He crumpled rapidly and fell, as though bone and sinew had been turned in a flash to water.

Woolworth swore and danced excitedly towards him. Hope followed in a more leisurely fashion. Between them they dragged him to the front of the van out of sight of the people. He recovered immediately and stood up, brushing mechanically at his black suit.

"All right again?" asked Hope.

"I'm all right," said Grant, a trifle dazed.

"Been feeling the heat?"

Grant shook his head.

"My breathing," he replied. "I couldn't breathe for a moment. Just here." He stopped, seemed to regret his communicativeness, and finished half suspiciously: "I'm all right."

But Woolworth saw his opportunity.

"Better not speak to-night," he put in officiously. "You know, if I were you I shouldn't speak at all. Take a rest. Lie down. Go for a walk on the sands."

"No," said Grant emphatically.

"Well, don't do much, anyhow. Give 'em a bare five minutes, I should say."

"No," said Grant once more. "It was nothing. I am perfectly well. I am perfectly able to do my duty. I'm going to make my usual speech, Woolworth."

Woolworth and he stared at one another for a little. Presently the former shrugged and walked away. Presently, too, Hope followed him, after glancing round the corner of the van.

"Ted Hawkins is good for another half-hour yet," he said. "I'll get you a glass of water from the village, Grant."

Once alone, Grant sat down upon one of the shafts, for he really was feeling much more shaky than he was willing to allow. He had never before fainted — if, indeed, that which had befallen him could be called a fainting fit; it was rather a temporary collapse caused by the strength of his emotions, by his inability to control these emotions. But again and again excitement had made him almost physically sick, for all the world as if his body were too small for the spirit it was expected to contain. He was quite unusually upset. He resolved to visit a doctor whenever he could find the time.

Comforted by this resolution, he dismissed the matter

of his health—he was a trifle hypochondriac in this respect—and again attended to the speechifying which he so loved, which was meat and drink to him, which was life itself. The singing was well over for the time being, and Ted Hawkins was speaking to the ever-increasing crowd, exhorting them in his familiar manner, with many bellowings, with much extravagant gesture. He, Grant, would speak next, and then Hope. And then very possibly Ted Hawkins would speak a second time—at least, he would want to do so. He, Grant, would give them plenty of illustrations this evening, partly because the sensation they usually caused pleased him, partly because Woolworth had been so annoyingly anxious that he should curtail those illustrations.

At this stage of his reflections some trifling sound startled him, and he looked up frowningly to see a neat, well-dressed young man strolling towards him from the direction of the road.

He was negligently burning a cigarette, and he had no hat upon his head. In age he must have been about thirty. The hair of his head was fairish and was carefully brushed, and a slight fair moustache was the only hair upon his face, which wore a good-humoured if a trifle quizzical expression. And in height he was but medium.

He came nearer, and Grant realised that his unostentatious tweed suit of a light check was uncommonly well made. Moreover, his necktie, though carelessly fastened, was of some rich, dark, silky, wine-coloured material, and had an air of distinction about it. His boots were of a deep brown. "An aristocrat," was Grant's bitter interior classification, and secretly he hated him for being that which he himself would fain have been.

The aristocrat spoke in a pleasant, cheerful voice :  
“ I say, you fellows haven’t got any petrol here, I suppose ? ”

Grant rose, tightened his lips, folded his arms, and shook his head.

“ I was afraid not,” said the stranger. “ It’s a nuisance. Well, it can’t be helped.”

He took a long pull at his cigarette, became aware of Ted Hawkins’s excited voice, changed his position and regarded him deliberately and with a touch of amusement, glanced comprehensively at the van and the extraordinary notices with which it was decorated. Finally he strolled back to Grant.

“ My car’s in the village,” he remarked conversationally. “ I’ve run out of petrol, and it just so happens that they haven’t a drop in the place. You never thought of having a motor-van, I suppose ? ”

“ No,” said Grant shortly.

“ That’s a pity. I might have managed to get some from you then,” said the stranger.

He hovered around for a little, and then sat down upon a shaft. He produced a silver cigarette-case with a monogram upon the front, and offered it to Grant.

“ Cigarette ? ” he suggested.

“ I seldom smoke,” said Grant. “ In any case, I have to make the next speech.”

“ Really ? ” the neat young man murmured, withdrawing the case. His eyes twinkled slightly, and he seemed about to hazard some doubtful remark. At the last minute, however, he changed his mind.

“ I’m bound for the other side,” he said, pointing across the Solway. “ I’m going to see a friend, and I know I shall be late now. Still, it can’t be helped. I’ve managed to telephone all right, and my friend’s bring-

ing his own car round here to pick me up. I say, it's rather difficult to speak against—that?" he broke off, nodding towards Ted Hawkins.

"I'm sorry if our legitimate business here disturbs you," said Grant sarcastically.

But the neat young man would not see this sarcasm.

"Not at all, not in the least," he said. "I'm quite interested. I'm looking forward to hearing you in a minute. I wonder if you'd mind telling me? Do you enjoy this kind of life?"

Grant faced him deliberately.

"My life is a useful one," he replied. "We don't deal in lies here, only in the truth. Men are very slow to come and listen to the truth. But someone has got to tell it."

The neat young man nodded.

"Very interesting," he summed up. "And about what you said just now—I quite agree, you know. Nobody is particularly anxious to hear the truth. They pretend they are. But they aren't, really. At least that's my experience."

Grant was slightly flattered.

"And mine too," he said pedantically. "I tell them that in my speeches. But"—he compressed his lips, shook his head, and concluded—"it's inexplicable to me, totally inexplicable."

"Oh, I don't know," said the other. "In a way, it's natural enough. It's easy enough for you and me to talk. But I daresay we might do the same——"

"I wouldn't," Grant put in here.

"You wouldn't, eh?"

"Never," said Grant with profound conviction.

But the neat young man laughed tolerantly.

"Ah, well, you never know till you've tried," he said. "Hullo! is this a friend of yours?"

## II

Hope returned just then, bearing a splashing glass of water, and Grant started, somewhat unnecessarily, to introduce him to the neat young man.

"This is Mr. Hope," he explained. "One of our best men. You must hear him speak to-night. And this—I haven't had the pleasure of learning your name yet, sir? My name's Grant. I'm sorry my card-case is in another pocket."

The neat young man entirely ignored the hint, nodding instead to Hope.

"Very warm to-night, isn't it?" he remarked pleasantly. "I've been troubling your friend for petrol. My car's stranded for want of it. And there's none in the village."

Hope handed the water to Grant in silence. Then he turned to the neat young man.

"No, sir," he replied. "I'm afraid there won't be. I expect they only get it once a week or so. This place is a good way off the main roads."

"But not too far for you fellows, apparently? Eh? I've been hearing all about you."

Hope smiled faintly.

"Oh, well," he said warily.

"You're out to give them the truth," the neat young man pursued. "Rather a tall order, don't you think?"

Hope evaded the question by asking one of his own.

"Have you come far, sir?" he asked.

"Only twenty miles," said the neat young man. "And only for pleasure. I wish I had gone straight through. I'm bound for across there, you know."

Grant cut in roughly, for he had been fidgeting all through the foregoing simple conversation. He wished

Hope would not so obviously acknowledge the stranger's superiority. There were ways and ways of saying "sir." It was most vexing, for latterly he had been anxious to convey by an air of easy familiarity that he was the stranger's social equal. He was intensely irritated.

"I don't want this water, Hope," he said in a loud voice. "I think you'd better take it to Mr. Hawkins. He'll be done in a minute, and I think he's rather hoarse."

He handed the glass back to Hope, who took it and quietly turned away. As he passed out of earshot, Grant smiled and leaned confidentially towards the neat young man.

"A very good man, Hope," he expatiated. "Very steady, you know, and reliable. But of course—well, as you perhaps noticed, he's not of our class."

The neat young man smiled non-committally. Grant went on :

"Everything's very mixed nowadays. If any of my people were living, they would have a fit to see the class I sometimes have to associate with. That's one of the minor disadvantages of this sort of life. But——"

"But you bear with it for truth's sake?" said the neat young man, with a slight trace of irony.

"Just that," Grant gravely assented.

The neat young man hesitated, and seemed on the point of rising. Then he thought better of it, and lit a fresh cigarette from the old one's stump.

"Have you been long at the life?" he presently inquired.

Grant settled himself even more confidentially.

"Seven years," he replied. "I was almost a boy when I took it up first—just nineteen." He laughed reminiscently. "It would make rather a story," he said, "quite

a romance. My people were very well off, you know. They gave me a splendid education. My father would have done anything for me. But"—he shrugged effectively—"but I didn't see it as he did. I wanted to be of some use in the world, so I went into expensive rooms for a bit, to think things over all by myself. And then after a month or two I decided, and took up this work. It's really very hard work, you know. And it's doubly hard, of course, for a gentleman. But—I'm thoroughly convinced people need to be warned about the—the menace of Rome. And a gentleman has a special scope—" He waved a vague hand and concluded : "Have you read many of our society's *Pamphlets for the People*, may I ask?"

The neat young man shook his head.

"I'm afraid they're too deep for me," he replied.

"Oh, you should read them," said Grant seriously. "I quote them very frequently in my speeches. In fact, those and the Bible are the only two authorities I ever do quote."

The neat young man, turning hastily away, stifled what may or may not have been a cough.

"Does your health benefit by your duties?" he asked in a minute.

Grant pondered this seriously.

"Yes and no," he replied at length. "That is to say, it has always suited me till recently, this sort of life. But of late I—I haven't been so well. I may say that I'm at present thinking of consulting a specialist—the next time I'm near London."

"Why not run up at once and do it?"

Grant shook his head and sighed.

"I doubt if they could spare me," he answered. "And the trains are so crowded in summer. Tourists and

people like that invade the first-class so. And local doctors—well !”

The neat young man nodded sympathetically.

“I could give you the name of a London specialist,” he remarked. “No; wait a minute! He’s not in London just now. As a matter of fact, he has a place near Bassenthwaite Water, and he’s staying there. I’ll give you a note, and he’s sure to see you.”

“Oh, I couldn’t think of troubling you,” began Grant in dismay. But :

“No trouble at all,” the other assured him. “His consulting fee’s only five guineas.”

He produced a note-book, and the stump of a lead-pencil.

“Five guineas!” said Grant, whose entire savings but amounted to ten pounds.

The other looked up with a mocking light in his eyes.

“Of course, it’s a small fee,” he said. “Nothing like what some of the other fellows would take. But the man whose address I’m giving you is quite young—well, moderately young. Good fellow, he is. Very competent and all that. To tell you the truth, I think more of him than I do of any other person in the world.”

“Ah, five guineas only, I think you said ?” asked Grant, who was searching desperately for some excuse for avoiding the doctor in question.

“Five guineas,” said the other. “That’s nothing to you, I know. Of course, I shouldn’t have proposed it if you hadn’t been of our class. Or if you hadn’t told me that your people were very well off. Or if you weren’t used to expensive rooms. Or if I didn’t know that you travelled first-class. Well, shall I give you the address ?”

Slowly a hot, angry flush darkened Grant’s cheeks.

The incredible truth was borne in upon him that this neat young man was making game, was actually making game of him! He clenched his teeth. He boiled with resentment, and would gladly have slain his tormentor. But his dignity checked him from any open retaliation, so he merely rose and turned his back upon the situation.

But before he could move farther the neat young man stopped him.

"Wait a minute!" he called laughingly.

Grant hesitated, but did not turn. And seeing his perplexity, the neat young man also rose and stepped quickly in front of him, still laughing.

"What a terrible fellow you are!" he said. "I'd no idea fire-eating was part of your stock-in-trade. . . . Lord, I've offended him again! . . . No, I say, don't go yet. I'm most awfully interested, really, and indebted for all your information."

Still Grant refused to be pacified. His lips twitched angrily, but before he could speak the other went on:

"I apologise. I really do! I tell you, I had no idea— Well, the fact is, I was having a joke with you. I'm the doctor whose name I was going to give you. I had some notion of recommending you to myself, and then watching your expression when you found out who I was, don't you see? My name's Henderson—Dr. Hunter Henderson. Now won't you sit down again and finish our talk?"

After a sharp inward struggle Grant did sit down, but he was still very much upon the defensive. Henderson, however, ignored this with admirable diplomacy. He seated himself beside Grant, and began to talk easily, as if nothing had happened.

"I suppose," he said, "it really was rude of me. I see that now. But I couldn't resist the temptation.

You spoke, you know, as if you were so frightfully keen on the truth and nothing but the truth."

"And do you dare to imagine—" Grant began.

But Henderson checked him with a gesture.

"Now, come!" he persuaded. "Let's be honest with each other. It's really great fun to be honest sometimes. And you needn't be afraid you'll ever run across me again, for I leave for Wellington next week."

"Wellington?" said Grant, with a frown.

"Yes, Wellington in New Zealand. Now, won't you talk to me?"

Whether or not the fact of Henderson's imminent departure weighed with Grant, it is impossible to say. At once, however, he seemed more ready to talk. He hesitated only for a few minutes longer. Then he turned abruptly to Henderson.

"Well," he demanded, "what do you wish to talk about?"

But for the moment Henderson evaded a direct reply.

"You know," he said rather pensively, "you really do interest me, somehow. After all, you're not quite like the rest. You don't seem to fit."

Once more Grant was flattered, but he still spoke very stiffly:

"I have told you the reason. I—I'm not of their class. I was at a public school, I've told you. And my people—"

"Yes, yes," Henderson checked him. "I know you've told me all that. But that wasn't what I meant. A man may go through Eton and Oxford, for that matter, and still be most suited by nature for the society of ploughmen. No; it was more your temperament. Tell me—and do, please, remember that we're talking honestly—tell me, do you really enjoy this life?"

"Most certainly," replied Grant without hesitation.

"And a few minutes ago you said that you'd never shut your eyes to the truth. That's a tall order, remember. Did you really mean that? Do you really believe it?"

"Of course I meant it!" cried Grant. "Of course I believe it! I suppose you're insulting me again."

But Henderson did not heed this last. He was fascinated by Grant, and was staring at him up and down in frank wonder.

"Amazing," he murmured, half to himself. Then, with a laugh: "By Jove, what an experiment! What an experiment, if I could only persuade you!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Grant distantly.

"Persuade you to face the truth, of course," Henderson eagerly explained. "Persuade you to try and see if you wouldn't shut your eyes to it——"

But again Grant interrupted.

"Do you suppose," he demanded fiercely, "that I would live this life if I did not love truth? I live it for the sake of the truth. For what else would I live it?"

Henderson eyed him narrowly for a little without replying. Then:

"I suppose," he said at last, "that you do it for the sake of the excitement and the glory it brings you. . . . Well, out of pride, if you like."

He delivered this deadly insult as if it had been a commonplace about the weather, without turning a hair. As for Grant, he sprang trembling to his feet. Anger had crushed his dignity, and he began at once to defend himself in a fury of anger.

"By heavens," he shouted, "I—I'll have you whipped! I'll have the law——"

"No," put in Henderson quickly, "for I didn't mean it quite as you have taken it. I don't mean that you necessarily disbelieve in what you say in your lectures. I dare say you quite think you are speaking the truth. But you think more of your pride than you do of the truth. You'd find it hard to give up this sort of work even if you found that it wasn't true."

"Never! I'd give it up to-morrow."

"Yes, but not to-day," said Henderson. Then, as he saw Grant's bewilderment, he went on: "You wouldn't drop it at once, you know—as if it were something unclean that you found you'd been holding. Perhaps you would mean to drop it. But you'd put it off until to-morrow, and then until the next day again. And presently you'd forget, don't you see, that you'd even found it untrue. You'd just go on."

It flashed here upon Grant that they were total strangers, and yet for the past few minutes they had been talking more earnestly and more profoundly than many lifelong friends would have done. He felt a trifle ashamed of his abandonment.

"Well, anyhow," he said sulkily, "it isn't untrue."

Henderson laughed gaily, flinging his serious manner away as he would have flung aside a cloak.

"Ah, well," he said, "I'd have to convince you that it was before you tried my experiment. Shouldn't I?"

"And that," said Grant, very simply but effectively—"that is what you could never do. Neither you, Dr. Henderson, nor any man. I can see that you think you know human nature. I should think you would do well to study it more closely. You have said yourself that there is something interesting about me. Well, do you think a man like I am, an educated unemotional man of the world, would ever commit himself—I might almost

say consecrate himself—to a life like this without feeling certain that it was all true? Why, do you imagine——”

But unhappily Henderson had grown wearied of this rather pedantic young man. He was simply a born experimentalist. His interest in Grant had waned from the moment he had failed to get him to face the truth.

He yawned widely, and on the instant Grant broke off, bursting with mortification, a veritable statue of outraged and injured majesty.

But Henderson did not see this, for he was not looking. “Well,” he said, with a regretful shrug, “of course I can’t force you.”

Without another word, Grant stalked majestically away. After a minute, too, Henderson rose, flicked the ash from his cigarette, strolled to the back of the van, and selected and sat down upon a log a little apart from the crowd, whence he could command a view of the platform. Ted Hawkins was very obviously at his peroration.

Grant, going to the same place in the reverse direction, was so dignified that he did not see where he was going. He collided violently with Woolworth, who was hurrying round to the front of the van with an absent, puckered expression upon his face, with a wrinkled forehead from which his bowler hat tilted far back.

“Ouch! Look where you’re stepping to, Grant,” he said. “Mind those bloody feet of yours.”

“I’m sorry,” said Grant freezingly.

But Woolworth scarcely seemed to hear him.

“I’m going into the van to go over those accounts,” he explained. “Tell Hope.”

So Grant sought Hope, and found him near the platform, restfully leaning against the van, surveying the crowd with that melancholy, masklike face of his. He did not in the least mind people staring at him.

"Woolworth's gone into the van," said Grant abruptly.  
"He asked me to tell you."

Hope merely nodded.

"I suppose I am to speak next," Grant went on, "but I don't want to. Will you speak next? And then I shall speak."

Hope turned his head and smiled a wry smile.

"Still feel the effects of that turn?" he asked.

"Not in the least," said Grant.

Hope relapsed into his former attitude.

"All right," he agreed. "That'll be all right. I'll speak next."

Grant withdrew a few paces and knitted his brow in a frown. The fact was, he still burned with a desire to impress Henderson and show him what he could do. That was why he had induced Hope to exchange places with himself. The exchange would give him extra time in which to prepare his speech. He wanted to make a most bitter, a most telling speech that evening, a speech, in fact, which would fill Henderson with admiration and awe and envy.

Yet his preparation was, after all, but the scantiest, since he could not for the life of him refrain from glancing furtively at Henderson's face, to see the impression everything was making upon him. Apparently it was not a very marked impression. For he took everything in with the identical half amused, slightly interested expression his face had first worn. At times he smiled ironically. Once—at some peculiarly mixed metaphor used by Ted Hawkins—once Grant could see that he laughed outright. The gaping, scandalised faces of the solemn villagers seemed, indeed, to interest him quite as much as the oratory.

Ted Hawkins came to a somewhat inconclusive end, and

descended from the platform dabbing at his face with his green handkerchief. At once Hope ascended and took his place. His quiet, self-possessed manner was a great improvement upon Hawkins's. His elocution was good, and his restraint perfect. Yet he, too, failed to capture Henderson's attention, though he made point after point with the deliberate skill of the practised speaker. And presently a motor hooted loudly from the road, and Henderson, much to Grant's disgust, rose to signal violently to its occupant. And at this the motor stopped. A man got slowly out and crossed the grass, a tall, soldierly, grey-haired old man with a clipped moustache and a slight limp. And Henderson persuaded him to the log beside him, and appeared to be explaining the meaning of the scene with much humour. . . . The expected friend who was bringing his car, Grant supposed. Another of the same breed. . . . Well, he would show them both.

Hope spoke for a bare ten minutes, and after he was finished another hymn was sung. The audience were by now thoroughly aroused, and the hymn was a simple one they had learnt from their mother's lips. So they joined in it with a note of passion, as the Northern folk always will join in a hymn or a psalm that they all know well. And this was perhaps the finest preparation for Grant, his ideal preparation, the one he would have chosen himself. For all his emotions were excited, and he fidgeted impatiently about, brimming with eloquence, tingling with a sense of his power. As the last strains of the hymn floated across the yellow sands, as a lark took up the hymn in a meadow far behind, he put off his hat and stepped impressively upon the platform.

He was acutely self-conscious, of course, but not in any such way as was likely to tie his tongue. He was

too experienced for that; he had faced crowds of strangers for fully six years by now. And thus he was perfectly able to study the faces beneath him with composure. He noted with complacence that the girls were admiring his looks and the men his clothes. He concentrated his whole will upon the business in hand. He fixed his stern eyes upon Henderson and his companion. He began very clearly and slowly :

"Ladies and gentlemen."

### III

Twenty-five minutes later Grant stepped down from the platform, flushed with triumph, perfectly conscious of the brave figure he had cut. For certainly he had cut a brave figure, certainly he had succeeded in impressing his unsophisticated audience deeply. Of Henderson and his companion he was not so sure. At least he knew that he had interested them.

He had begun quite deliberately with a few general observations on his motives in speaking to them that evening. He had assured them, with a firm, quiet manner which carried conviction, that these motives were entirely disinterested. "I am but a servant of the truth," he had told them, "the truth which alone will make you whole." He had expatiated upon his favourite theme : the crying need for men to face the truth, "no matter what it cost them."

And then, with calculated indignation and a new ringing note in his voice, he had challenged boldly the whole truth of the system whose truth it was his business to challenge. "The truth shall make you whole," he had cried. "But look at the Middle Ages ! Look at Spain and Ireland and Italy of the present day ! Are

these countries prosperous? Are these countries healthy? Are these countries whole? No, they are not so; they are rotten and effete because they are starved of the truth by that terrible system of falsehood which directs and governs them. And they never will be whole. I say that they never will be whole till the truth prevails in them, till they throw off the burden which is breaking them. Let me show you more clearly what I mean, my friends. Let me give you a few examples—all of them literally true, remember, each of them well guaranteed by the League I represent."

And then, of course, he had proceeded to cite his examples; that was the one weakness of an otherwise admirable speech. Yet it was a great, indeed a fatal, weakness, since the speech was practically nothing but a lengthy list of examples cleverly strung together. There was not the slightest serious attempt made to attack either the dogmas or the moral discipline of the Catholic religion. He gave them nothing but illustrations—illustrations pointed against priests and convents and Catholic laymen of the better classes, painful illustrations thoroughly calculated to prejudice the ignorant and to grieve and anger any devout Catholic lady who happened to be present. A critical listener might have wanted proof more definite. Even supposing the given examples were true, they were no sort of argument against Catholicism, but only against certain Catholics who had failed to act up to the beliefs which they professed. And even supposing the countries he had so glibly mentioned were commercially weak owing to their predominant religion, and not owing to certain internal disadvantages, a lack of important minerals, climate, and the like—even supposing this, it would rather seem to point to their religion's truth. For surely

it is a commonplace that a man or a country cannot consistently do right save often at the expense of his or her material prosperity. You cannot, after all, serve two masters, God and Mammon. . . .

But John Horton Grant did not appear to remember this. . . .

His mental attitude at this stage of his life provides an amazing study. He had never entered a Catholic church, never spoken with a single Catholic, never studied Catholic belief in either partial or impartial authorities. He believed like a fanatic in the Probit League which employed him. This society—of prejudiced middle-aged bigots, of unscrupulous adventurers seeking any outlet for their talents—this society gave him certain unpleasant stories for the truth of which they vouched. It was enough. The life of a roving lecturer seemed to be the one profession whose demands he was capable of satisfying. He accepted the stories given him with never a tremor of doubt. On this particular occasion he had touched lightly upon certain members of the Borgia family, and had narrated with peculiar detail (which he enjoyed) the story of Maria Monk, the story of Pope Joan, and lastly the astounding story of the Rogers case, over which he had disputed with Woolworth previous to the meeting. . . .

Towards the end of his speech he had observed with satisfaction that Henderson grasped his elderly companion by the arm, restrained him from starting up impulsively at something in the speech which had startled him. Now, as he left the platform he perceived that his pair of important critics had risen and were coming to meet him. This was as it should be. Clearly he had impressed them, after all. He deflected his course a trifle in order to meet them the sooner.

Henderson had become for the moment serious.

"We want you to tell us," he began when they met—"we want you to tell us a—a something you raised in your address just now."

Grant folded his arms and nodded.

"Your point?" he demanded haughtily.

Henderson exchanged glances with his companion, and hesitated for just a second. He cleared his throat. Then :

"You were telling a story," he said, "about a gentleman called Rogers. Do you mind repeating that story? Perhaps we didn't catch. Do you mind going over the story? Word for word, if you please?"

Again Grant nodded.

"Not in the least," he replied formally. "I am never afraid to tell my stories at any time. The exact facts of the case are these: Mr. Rogers was a Catholic land-owner. He is still living, I believe, and very well off. Hearing of certain gross injustices which he was perpetrating on a Protestant servant, the society I represent sent an agent to inquire and if necessary to remonstrate. And Mr. Rogers denied all knowledge of the servant in question. But our agent was not satisfied with this. When he left Mr. Rogers he engaged one of his maid-servants in talk. This girl was a Catholic, like her master, but she seems none the less to have had a measure of common sense and a great longing for the truth. She knew nothing concerning the other servant, but the talk turning naturally upon religion, our agent was able to sow in her the seeds of truth. The seed fell upon good ground. The poor girl responded immediately. She confessed with much fear her hatred of the system which was enslaving her, and begged our agent with tears to rescue her then and there. He did what he could. He

consoled her as well as he was able. He repeated the truths which he had told her. And he was in the very act of giving her a little New Testament that he always carried, when Mr. Rogers, who must have been listening around some corner, rushed upon him, followed by a rabble of servants, seized him despite his indignant protests, violently threw him into a kind of cellar-dungeon, and left him there alone. I will not go into too many details. Our agent did his utmost to escape—uselessly, however. There is little question Mr. Rogers meant him to die there of starvation, for otherwise he would scarcely have treated him as he did, for fear of what he might disclose. But that night the servant-girl whose heart he had touched lowered him a rope. She helped him to escape from the house, doubtless at a great personal risk."

As Grant made an end of his story, Henderson nodded thoughtfully.

"Word for word the same," he murmured. "It—it's simply incredible." Then, turning abruptly to his companion and raising his voice: "Shall I tell him?" he asked. Henderson waited for a little. Then, taking silence to mean consent, he turned once more to Grant.

"This is Mr. Rogers himself," he said, indicating his companion.

Grant was startled. It would be untrue to say that he was anything but startled. Yet he was not guiltily startled, since he was far too sure of his position for that. He felt much as an orthodox Christian would feel if confronted suddenly by the devil: that here was an evil personage whom he had always firmly credited, whom he had often denounced, but whom he had never expected to see in this world at any rate. None the less, he controlled his emotions perfectly, and managed to say in a firm, cold voice:

"Indeed? Then I fear I must decline the introduction you offer."

Mr. Rogers exploded at this.

"Well, upon my word," he stuttered, "I—I—I never came across such cool insolence in all my life! Damn it, sir! what do you mean? You publicly—you—you publicly take away my character first of all. By the most abominable tissue of lies—"

"Oh no, Mr. Rogers, not lies," Grant suavely interrupted.

And this puzzled Mr. Rogers.

"Eh?" he said. "Of course they're lies! You don't mean to tell me that you believe those miserable inventions—"

"They're the truth!" cried Grant passionately.  
"They're the naked truth!"

He closed his jaws with a snap, and began to tremble, he knew not why. Under the leadership of Hope they were singing another hymn by the van. The sun had begun to dip, too, behind some streaky inky flecks of cloud in the west. And the sun's reflection, seen in the calm Solway and the shining sands, seemed like a long glittering path, paved with gold.

Henderson touched Mr. Rogers lightly upon the arm.

"We don't want a scene," he reminded him.

"No," said Mr. Rogers, "we don't want a scene. That's quite true. But—" He glanced doubtfully about him.

"I am willing to go into this further," said Grant.  
"But mind, I shall have no mercy."

Mr. Rogers stuttered once again.

"Do—do you hear that impertinence?" he asked of his companion. "He's willing to go into it further, but he'll have no mercy." He turned scathingly upon

Grant. "I thank you for your kindness in that," he declared, "but it may interest you to know that I should have forced you to go into it further, whether you were willing or not. I—I'm not in the habit of swallowing a libel tamely. If there's any justice in England, you'll regret this night." He thought for a moment. "There's a little hotel in the village," he concluded. "I was taking my car here. We'll get hold of a room in the hotel. And we'll thresh this business out."

He was turning away with this, but Henderson murmured a discreet suggestion, and so he came back.

"You must come just now," he told Grant roughly. "But the rest of you must come, too, when this nonsense is over. Better leave a message."

Grant inclined his head loftily, hesitated for a little; finally he noticed Ted Hawkins leaning against the van, deep in one of his trances. He stepped abruptly up to him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're all to come to the hotel in the village," he said, "whenever the meeting is over. Will you remember?"

And without awaiting his reply he strode towards the road at a rapid pace, followed immediately by Mr. Rogers and Henderson.

#### IV

When they reached the road, Mr. Rogers spoke shortly to his chauffeur, entered the car and drove off. Henderson accompanied Grant on foot, walking abreast with him in perfect silence. In about five minutes they reached the King's Arms Hotel, where, apparently, they were expected. For the proprietress of the hotel, greatly agitated by the unexpected guests, ushered them into

a long low-roofed dining-room on the ground floor, wherein Mr. Rogers was already awaiting them.

Henderson sat down by Mr. Rogers, and began a murmured conversation with evident enjoyment of the whole situation. After a moment of frowning indecision, Grant also sat down, rather defiantly, and at the end of the table farther from the other two. Half an hour passed in silence, and Grant was becoming more and more uncomfortable with every minute, since he felt (quite absurdly, as he told himself) as though he were a prisoner at the bar. Combat as he might with this feeling, he could not get rid of it. The strain grew unbearable, and he was on the point of saying something—anything—when the door opened with a creak, and Ted Hawkins and Hope advanced with hesitation into the room.

Never before had Grant been so thankful to see his colleagues. He rose gladly, murmuring something or the other about “the long time they had taken.” Neither Mr. Rogers nor his companion rose, but the former pointed Hope and Hawkins to their seats, and at this Grant sat down once more. Mr. Rogers cleared his throat to speak, but Grant anticipated him by saying to his colleagues in an indifferent voice :

“This is Mr. Rogers, whose case I had occasion to touch upon in my speech to-night.”

The remark was sufficiently amazing in its effect, for Hope, the quiet and the self-possessed Hope, started to his feet as at the sound of a gun.

“*What?*” he said sharply, looking from one to another. Then he recovered himself and turned watchfully to Mr. Rogers. “Is that so, sir?” he asked.

For reply Mr. Rogers extracted a pocket-book, fumbled amidst its pages, and tossed a card to Hope—

all in silence. Hope, by now well upon the defensive, scrutinised the card without sign of emotion. Presently he placed it slowly upon the table directly in front of him, and gazed at it meditatively with lowered eyelids.

Mr. Rogers began without further preliminaries:

"I've brought you all here to have some explanation of this—this hole-and-corner business. That fellow there"—he nodded towards Grant—"that fellow there has been libelling me to-night. I don't need to repeat what he said, I suppose. You both heard it?"

"Well—" began Hope slowly.

But Grant cut him short impatiently:

"Of course you heard my speech, Hope. You and Mr. Hawkins were there all the time."

"Well," said Hope as before.

"In any case," put in Mr. Rogers grimly, "I have a witness of my own. My friend here, Dr. Henderson."

"I tell you, Mr. Rogers," said Grant haughtily, "there is no need of your witness. My friends heard my speech, and are quite willing to admit it. We are not afraid of the truth, Mr. Rogers."

Hope sighed, and shrugged slightly, as though he were yielding to fate.

"All right, sir," he said quietly to Mr. Rogers. "We heard Grant's speech."

Mr. Rogers nodded.

"Then you'll hear my side of it now," he said. He addressed himself directly to Grant, and began: "You've talked the most cock-and-bull nonsense about poor servant-girls whom your confounded agent tried to bring into the light. You've said that I threw him into a cellar or something, I think. Well, this is what really happened. Some time ago a fellow called at my place, and said he wanted to go over it. It's an old

place, you know—sixteenth century. I showed him round myself a bit; I remember now that I gave him beer and things, and afterwards, as I was feeling tired, I told him he could look about for himself. Well, what do you think happened? There was a housemaid of mine, quite a good girl, and this fellow tried to seduce her. I call it that, you know, but a lawyer might find a stiffer name for it. A couple of gardeners caught him just in time. He was trying to trip the girl up, and she was struggling as hard as she could. My people wouldn't stand that sort of thing. They started to mob the fellow, in fact, and decided to give him a ducking. I didn't interfere, for it seemed to me he was getting off too easily. They lowered him gently into an old dungeon that was half full of water; but he didn't get much wet, for he made such a row that the girl he had insulted was sorry for him, and begged him off. Now, what do you say to that?"

Grant shrugged indifferently.

"I know, of course, that it's a lie," he said.

Mr. Rogers sprang to his feet with a sharp exclamation. His companion tried to restrain him. Hope also sprang to his feet. There was a slight commotion, and presently Hope's voice could be heard rising above the disturbance.

"Grant didn't mean it, sir," he was assuring Mr. Rogers. "He's young, you know, sir. Quick-tempered. Couldn't I see you privately——"

Mr. Rogers recovered himself, and waved him into silence. He turned to Grant.

"Explain yourself," he said shortly.

Grant, who had remained apparently indifferent to the scene, now smiled slightly.

"I know, of course, that it's a lie," he repeated. "The

League guarantees that the story I told is true. And therefore yours must be a lie."

"What about the girl? Eh?"

"Your own housemaid."

"The men who found him, then?"

"Your own gardeners."

"I see! Bribery and corruption all round, you think? Well, let me tell you——" Mr. Rogers broke off open-mouthed, and pointed suddenly at the door. "Why—why," he stuttered indignantly, "there's the fellow himself! The man that they ducked!"

Everyone turned to the door, and Grant was the first to do so. Yet he saw no one there but Woolworth, and such was his credulity, such his bewilderment, that it did not even remotely occur to him that Woolworth could be the man in question. Woolworth had just come into the room, and seemingly was a little startled at seeing so many people there. He bore himself jauntily.

"I've just come along to look after my little lot," he said, attempting to be jocular and familiar.

Then he suddenly caught sight of Mr. Rogers, and his entire bearing changed with a celerity that was almost comical.

"Old Rogers," he gasped, turning to Hope.

And at this Grant's assurance received a severe blow—the first blow of the interview, indeed.

"You know him?" he said, frowning uncomprehendingly upon Woolworth.

But before the latter could reply:

"Of course he knows me!" Mr. Rogers irritably put in. "Haven't I told you that that's the man, that that's the fellow my servants ducked?"

Grant bent towards Woolworth.

"Deny it!" he hissed, with a kind of concentrated ferocity in his voice. "Deny it this instant!"

Woolworth sat down with an air of bravado. He shook his head.

"He can say what he blooming well likes!" he muttered, trying to appear indifferent to such trifles.

"Deny it!" said Grant once more.

But before Woolworth could speak:

"He can't deny it," said Mr. Rogers. "Of course he can't deny it. Let him try."

Woolworth sneered:

"What's the good of trying? I'm only a poor chap. I haven't got the money to fight Mr. Rogers, Esquire."

For the first time Henderson proceeded to take an active part in the discussion.

"I'm rather keen on seeing justice done," he put in. "So if money's the trouble I'm quite willing to pay all the expenses of any action you feel like bringing against Mr. Rogers here."

Woolworth shook his head.

"Think it well over," Henderson urged him. "Libel's the deuce of a serious thing. If I were you, you know, I'd prosecute." Then, as Woolworth was silent, he went on: "Perhaps you think I'm not serious about this? Well, I'm willing to give you a written promise that I'll pay all expenses. Doesn't matter what they are. If you bring an action against Mr. Rogers for saying you were ducked by his servants because you behaved like a cad to a girl, I'll pay for that action. Come! You needn't be frightened. I'm really pretty fairly off, you know."

Woolworth almost snarled:

"What's the use of bringing an action? You know it'd be all U P. You know I'd lose it."

Here Grant sprang to his feet, quivering with excitement. He pointed a dramatic accusing finger at Woolworth. And :

"You were the man?" he shouted incredulously. "You behaved like—like what he said? Then what he said is true?"

Woolworth's eyes narrowed, and he turned nastily upon Grant.

"It's all your bloody fault," he said. "Why couldn't you cut out the Rogers 'case to-night—and him across the water? I warned you, Hope warned you, we both warned you—" He stopped before the pale terror which Grant's face was expressing. He concluded lamely : "Well, what's the matter now? Seen a ghost, have you?"

Grant's lips moved piteously, but never a sound escaped them. Everyone there was now watching him, everyone had temporarily forgotten the main business on hand, confronted by the unique drama of Grant's disillusionment. Presently Woolworth continued :

"Speak up!" he said savagely.

Again Grant parted his lips, and this time he could be distinctly heard.

"Hope knew," he whispered. "Hope knew all the time. That was why he wanted me to cut it out." He looked suddenly at Hope. "Why did you let a story be told that you knew was a lie?" he asked him.

Hope smiled faintly. He had been disillusioned many years before.

"Wife and child," he replied briefly. "You can't risk losing a job when you're married, Grant."

Grant sighed. After a second :

"Mr.—Mr. Hawkins?" he said shakily. "Did you—"

But a glance was enough to assure him of the truth. Ted Hawkins was a bad actor.

"You knew, too," said Grant as in a nightmare.

For Ted Hawkins was wriggling uncomfortably, for all the world like a disobedient child caught in the act. He would meet no one's eye.

"Doesn't do to be too particular," he murmured uneasily. Then: "So to speak," he added, as an after-thought.

Grant surveyed him up and down.

"Have you a wife and child?" he asked.

Hawkins shook his head violently several times.

"No, John, no," he replied. "I never was your marrying kind of a chap."

"Then why——"

Hawkins blew his nose.

"You're pressing me," he feebly expostulated. "You're pressing me something cruel, John. I've told you that—it doesn't do to be too particular. You ought to believe an older man when he tells you a thing. It's not, so to speak, what you say, John. Not the facts, I mean. It's all the personality that does it. Think of the influence a man with personality has. Not by what he says, but how he says it, don't you see? Some men must get their chance. And I was once on the stage, John. I—I wasn't what you might call a success, so to speak——"

But in a flash Grant saw the whole horrible truth. He saw Ted Hawkins for what he really was, a helpless, sentimental bundle of emotionalism, an old transparent fraud who, utterly indifferent to facts, was made quite happy by the sound of his own voice. . . .

"Don't—don't——" he entreated, meaning thereby that he could not stand any more.

Before Ted Hawkins could reply, Woolworth cut in :

"For heaven's sake, let's make an end to this. Look here, Mr. Rogers, my time's valuable. I may say, I'm responsible for the business side of the show. What are you meaning to do?"

Mr. Rogers hesitated for an instant. Finally he said :

"I could prosecute for slander, and win my case if I wanted to, but it's not worth my while. This sort of thing—it's too contemptible. And besides, it would seem that your lecturer has been more of a fool than a knave." He spoke directly to Woolworth. "You," he said—"you must sign a paper acknowledging that you've been spreading a slander."

Woolworth shook his head.

"Hope," he said sulkily—"Hope's in charge of that branch. Hope must sign."

Mr. Rogers was doubtful.

"Which is Hope?" he was beginning, when Hope himself interrupted.

"I'll sign the paper most willingly, sir," he said. "And many thanks for letting us down so easily."

Mr. Rogers nodded.

"Very good," he said shortly. "And you, sir"—he turned fiercely upon Grant—"you're escaping very lightly, let me tell you. I know the methods of the charlatans who employ you, so I'm letting you down lightly. But you must undertake never to mention me again in any of your speeches. Do you hear?"

Grant bit his lip and averted his head.

"I hear," he mumbled ungraciously.

"And you promise?"

Grant scowled malignantly, drew himself up, and folded his arms. But before he could answer, Henderson intervened :

"You really don't need to ask him that, sir. Mr. Grant and I have already had a chat. Mr. Grant is probably even more disgusted than you at what has happened, for he is a great lover of the truth. He won't remain in his present profession, since the truth is not in it."

"How do you know that the truth is not in it?" Grant was beginning. "Woolworth——"

But before he could go on Woolworth cut in nastily:

"Now, look here, Mr. Deadly-Earnest Grant, we've had about enough of you. I'm about fed up with you, I am. You needn't try to put any more blame on me, for I shan't have it. See? Your blooming League's to blame for letting that story float around, for I told 'em months back that it wasn't safe—and I can prove it."

Before Grant could reply to this, Henderson went on, with an evident relish:

"There you are. You see, Mr. Rogers, how needless your warning was. The truth abides not with his profession, so he's going to give it up. Why, he told me he didn't really like the life, that he only stuck to it in order to serve the truth!"

At this Ted Hawkins emitted wails of protest:

"You aren't going to leave us, John? The life that's always suited you! You're born to it, so to speak. You ought to believe an older man, when he tells you a thing, John."

And even the wary Hope was moved to a discreet remonstrance.

"It'll be rather a fight, won't it?" he murmured. "Finding a new job that suits you."

Grant looked rapidly from one to another and then to Henderson, in an agony of indecision and mortified pride.

"I shall discuss afterwards," he was beginning rather stiffly, when a laugh from Henderson infuriated him, and he threw prudence to the winds.

He turned directly upon Henderson.

"How do you know what my plans are?" he demanded fiercely. "What right have you to assume that I'm not as good as my word? How do you know that I don't intend to give it up?"

Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"You haven't said so."

"And wouldn't I need to find some other work?" went on Grant. "First? Before I give up what I have?"

"And go on lecturing till you find it, I suppose?" here put in Henderson mockingly. "Taking part in a propaganda that you know isn't true."

Grant fidgeted for a little, at a loss how to reply. Finally :

"I must find something else first," he said fretfully.

And at this Henderson's manner became more mocking than ever.

"Exactly," he sneered triumphantly. "That's my whole point. Don't you remember I told you you were bound to put off? That it would always be 'to-morrow' and not 'to-day'?"

"Oh, it's all very fine to talk!" said Grant bitterly. "Well, why don't you talk openly? You think I'm a coward. Say so, then. I can't prove you are wrong. But it's easy to talk. Instead of talking, why don't you give me a start at something? You say you have plenty of money . . ."

His voice broke indignantly, and then trailed off into silence. Henderson, quite unimpressed by his vehemence, merely smiled reflectively.

"You forget," he presently remarked, "that I'm off to Wellington next week."

"Then, don't talk," cried Grant, pressing his advantage and growing more dictatorial. "If I can't prove you are wrong, at least you can't prove you are right." He laughed scornfully, then added: "Or why don't you pay me out to New Zealand? Then you might have some right to talk."

Henderson was silent under this, so, taking a forward step and curling his lip:

"I suppose you'll tell me next," Grant sneered, "that you're quite willing to pay my fare to New Zealand?"

Henderson nodded cheerfully, and Grant, perfectly furious by now, shouted:

"Well, do it! Go on! Pay me out to New Zealand!"

But Henderson shook his head reflectively.

"No, Grant," he said gently. "On second thoughts, no. I'm afraid you wouldn't stay there. You couldn't stand it."

"Dr. Henderson was joking, of course," put in Mr. Rogers coldly.

Up to this point he had been, like the other three, a silent, interested spectator of the duel Grant and Henderson were fighting. But now he thought it was high time to interfere.

"Dr. Henderson was joking," he said coldly. "Come, that's quite enough. You've been let down very easily, I consider."

But Grant was fairly beside himself, beyond the reach of reason. Hope had laid a restraining hand upon his arm. But he shook it off as though its light touch burned him.

"I knew it," he said, with an exclamation of disgust.

"Joking! Well, I consider it very vulgar that he should joke like that."

He turned triumphantly away, glancing furtively at Hope and Woolworth to see if they observed his triumph and admired him for it. But they were both looking past him at Henderson, so he turned once more to learn the reason. And Henderson, far from appearing defeated, was nodding gently.

"But I wasn't joking, you know," he said casually.

"Eh?" cried Mr. Rogers, as much astonished as any of the others.

"I wasn't joking," Henderson repeated. "I shall be very pleased if Mr. Grant will accompany me to Wellington. He will enliven"—he stifled a yawn—"he will probably enliven an otherwise tedious voyage."

Grant stared at him helplessly, too astonished to remember either his dignity or his anger. And presently:

"Do I understand you properly?" he managed to get out. "You said you would pay me to New Zealand? All my expenses?"

"All your expenses."

"First-class?"

Grant's innate snobbery had become his second nature. He rapped the question suspiciously out, almost without hearing it. Henderson threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"Why, yes," he agreed, after a minute. "By all means. First-class."

Grant started to speak, but no words would come. So, after gaping for a moment, he closed his mouth, and looked in his bewilderment for guidance from the expressions of the faces around him. But by now they were all expressionless.

"I—I don't understand," he murmured vaguely. "You

seem to be in earnest. Why are you doing this—this extraordinary . . . ”

“Well,” said Henderson in the most business-like fashion possible, “you’ve seen that my sense of humour smacks of the *Arabian Nights*. I admire that book. And in particular I admire the story of the wealthy man who experimented on all his friends by giving them money—to see what they would do. It’s rather the same thing, isn’t it?”

Grant looked as bewildered as ever, so Henderson went on quickly :

“Or take another example. A Spaniard goes to a bull-fight for the sake of the struggle. Now imagine life is a bull. And that you are a cowardly toreador, who won’t take it by the horns——”

“I see!” cried Grant, suddenly stiffening again. But Henderson continued quite placidly :

“New Zealand’s the bull-ring. I am the interested public. The public pays the expenses in the hope of an interesting and amusing entertainment——”

“Enough!” cried Grant, who could bear not another pleasantry. “Enough!” he repeated. “I accept your offer.”

Hope, Hawkins, and Woolworth all joined together in a murmur of remonstrance, but Grant would not listen to them.

“No,” he said, waving them aside; “I have nothing more to say to you. You have put me to-day in an abominable position.” He turned again to Henderson. “When do we start?” he demanded dramatically.

Henderson evaded the question for a moment.

“Remember,” he said warningly, “you’ll only have a single ticket. Once you have landed my bargain ends. You must look after yourself then, and you won’t get

a job out there like you have here, you know. You'll have to face life and men and hard work—the truth, in fact. And you can't funk it and come back, for you won't have the money."

Grant loftily ignored this, so after a slight pause Henderson went on :

" You know what it means ? You promise to stick to the bargain ? You might want me to break it, you know. You might come to me on the boat—or after we got to New Zealand—whining, begging for something better. You promise you'll never do this ? "

" Never ! " cried Grant haughtily.

Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

" Very well, then," he concluded, " there remains no more to be said. We start on Friday."

But it is doubtful if Grant really heard the answer to his question, for the old mood of abstraction was upon him once more.

## CHAPTER III

### THE S.S. "WANAKA"

#### I

THE s.s. *Wanaka*, one of the Australasian Shipping Company's older and smaller vessels, heaved imperceptibly as the swollen Mersey battled rebelliously with a strongly flowing tide, almost at the turn, and the saloon deck was in the customary state of chaos that immediately precedes departure. Excited passengers—natural for once in their lives because of their excitement, and thus in many cases excruciatingly funny—sought missing friends or baggage in a series of futile rushes over the same ground. Self-effacing porters and sailors trotted to and fro, dexterously picking their way in and out of the mob, as though it were a maze to which they possessed the key. One or two perspiring officers elbowed a course straight through the mob, taking great purposeful strides, quite simply absorbed in the task of getting where they wanted in the least possible time. It was a very novel phase of life for John Horton Grant, who had never before sailed upon the sea—no, not as far as the Isle of Man.

He felt very much out of it and rather self-conscious. Indeed, for the time being he was literally alone, since Henderson had disappeared within five minutes of their arrival, and a timid search that Grant had just concluded had utterly failed to locate him. Of course, if Grant had known anything at all about travelling he

would have hunted out his cabin, taken possession, locked the door, and then gone for a quiet drink or a smoke until the ship was fairly started. But he knew nothing about his cabin, except that he was to have it to himself. (He owed this to Henderson, who had conceived a private aversion to having him for a sleeping companion.) So he loitered aimlessly on the busiest part of the deck, smoking a cigarette which he did not want and which was ruined, anyway, by the stiff breeze that was on. And he imagined that harassed officials were furtively looking askance at him. It is highly probable that such was indeed the case, for from their point of view he was a tremendous nuisance. He was blocking the direct line of passage between one of the gangways and the saloon companion-way.

A special train had just arrived bringing the last arrivals for the voyage, and these were coming quickly on board by the gangway Grant was blocking, while a steady trickle of non-travellers had begun to leave by another gangway. Grant envied both parties. He had conceived suddenly a violent love of country which bordered upon the sentimental, and he envied the departures because they were not bound for a painful exile. And he was also longing wistfully for the coolness and assurance that experience of travelling alone can give. So he envied the arrivals because of their ability to treat a journey like this as if it were a mere bus-ride. They had about ten minutes to spare, and yet their indifference was perfect. . . .

A smart blow on his shin and a smothered exclamation of dismay recalled him to his whereabouts, and he gathered his wits together in order to meet the apologies of one of these arrivals who had just dropped a weighty hand-bag upon his leg. Quite mechanically he stooped

quickly and recovered the hand-bag, and then he looked up to find a tall, pale young woman standing before him. He had just time to notice her dark eyes and her dark glossy hair before his wits were again scattered in his intense anxiety to behave easily and naturally.

"That was so stupid of me," she said. "I haven't hurt you much?"

"Oh no, indeed," he protested. "No trouble. I mean to say, not at all. Here is your—" He proffered her the hand-bag, hesitating a little over how he should call it.

She took it gently from him with a faint smile. "Thank you so very much," she said. "It was very clumsy of me."

"But I assure you—" he again protested.

She, however, cut him short.

"Oh yes, it was clumsy," she repeated. "And you returned good for evil, didn't you?"

She smiled once more, and was gone before he could reply. He suppressed an absurd impulse to start after her, and relapsed at once into his original mood of self-conscious suspicion.

A few more passengers came on board, and presently a deep hoarse siren whistled warningly. At this the babel of the deck trebled itself. There was a regular carnival of final kissing and hand-shaking. Then the last companies of those who were not sailing trooped ashore like rats deserting a sinking ship. They went to swell the crowd upon the quay, a crowd which presented itself to the saloon deck merely as a collection of swaying tilted faces and fluttering handkerchiefs. Grant, of course, was instantly reminded of the life he had left behind him. So familiar were his sensations for a moment that he could imagine the crowd to be

one of gaping villagers, and the deck of the *Wanaka* to be the tail-board of the Probity League's van. He stiffened, folded his arms, and gazed sombrely down upon the quay. His entire pose was vaguely reminiscent of the pictures of Napoleon's departure for St. Helena, and his versatile spirits had risen unaccountably, so that he now believed himself to be the cynosure of a thousand admiring eyes.

The ship trembled deliberately from stem to stern, and he noticed with surprise—for he could scarcely believe that they had moved—that a narrow moat of troubled water now ran between the ship and the quay. For nearly fifteen seconds there was a quick muffled throbbing, and the whole quay and the sheds and houses behind it shot violently forward. There was an instant's pause. Then the throbbing recommenced, and with an even greater velocity the quay shot astern. A dripping rope controlled by some invisible agency hissed through the water (a moat no longer, but a churning lake now) and rapidly disappeared into the hull of the ship. A brave cheer floated across the lake from the quay, and was answered from the ship. The throbbing settled down into a steady regular thumping. Grant realised with curiously mixed emotions that that thumping was to be his daily and his nightly experience for many weeks to come, and that their next port-of-call was Rio de Janeiro, a fabulous South American town which had hitherto been associated in his mind with impossible adventures on the Spanish Main, which he could not for the life of him picture as a solid sober fact like the city they were just leaving.

As the ship drew farther away from the land—and in an incredibly short time every individual object upon the land was merged into a great irregular blur—as

the ship pointed her head to the flowing tide, Grant abandoned his dramatic attitude and drifted forlornly to the port rail, whence he could watch the smoke of Birkenhead. He afforded the curious spectacle of a first-class passenger from Liverpool to Wellington—and one at that with a private cabin!—who possessed eleven-pence ha'penny in his right-hand trouser pocket, and beyond that sum not a farthing in all the world. When Henderson had first discovered him in Cumberland his resources had been ten pounds. But an evening suit for use at dinner on the voyage had halved that amount. And shirts and a lounge suit of cheap thin white flannel had swallowed up the remaining half, except for the eleven-pence ha'penny just mentioned. So already such pleasure as the novelty of the adventure might have brought him was considerably damped. It is rather a trying experience to pass even a couple of hours in a fashionable hotel or in the first-class section of a steamer without plenty of small change available.

But it must not be imagined that he wished himself back at his old life. With a temperament like his he would have found that life very galling now, for he would have had to continue his association with Hope, Hawkins, and Woolworth, three people who had witnessed his humiliation at the hands of old Mr. Rogers. He would not have minded so much if he could have kept his humiliation to himself, or if Hope, Hawkins, and Woolworth could have passed for ever from his life the moment they had learnt of it. In fact, Henderson had been right. In the ordinary course of events he would have known a bad few days, and would then most conveniently have managed to forget the lesson his humiliation should have taught him. He needed more than humiliation to cure him of his deadly pride.

Nor was his brief spasm of envy of those who were remaining in England based upon real regret at the step he had taken. A man getting up on a cold winter morning may envy his neighbour whom he knows to be still abed without regretting the breakfast which is his probable reason for getting up. Grant's envy of home-keeping people was so far only a manifestation of the sadness everyone feels upon abandoning a familiar condition for any lengthy period. It is in such a spirit of sadness that a bride weeps at her marriage, be that marriage ever so happy a one.

Despite his awkwardness, despite other unforeseen discomforts, Grant's mood was mainly one of exhilaration and confidence in his own powers, as he leaned passively by the port rail. He was inevitably a little forlorn, but not so far more forlorn than he was able to bear. . . .

Time, after all, passes more rapidly on shipboard than it is popularly supposed to do. Grant, who had been envisaging the future, came sharply back to the present to find that he had loitered long enough for the stiff breeze to chill him to the bone. He pulled out his watch and looked at it. He found that Liverpool was already two or three hours astern of them. The sea was turbulent, and very choppy with little white leaping waves, and a good distance off he could see a line of cliffs that bordered the coast. As a matter of fact, they were just rounding the north-west of the Island of Anglesey, getting fairly into St. George's Channel and the strong sea which was running there. Low scudding black clouds were everywhere, and at times they blotted out the coast from which the wind was blowing them. A sudden squall struck the ship, and a patter of cold rain which the Welsh hills had condensed drove stincingly

into Grant's face. The ship rolled ponderously, lifted her head from the water, righted herself slowly, then pitched sharply forward. This antic was repeated, and again repeated. A curious spinning began in Grant's head, and a horrible sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach. He gripped the rail with both his hands and looked in turn at the rising and falling deck, the dark sky, and the churning water. There was no relief to be had from any of these, and suddenly he knew what was inevitable in the course of the next few minutes. He staggered blindly away to find his cabin or a lavatory, or anywhere, for that matter, where he could shelter himself and his misery.

## II

Two or three days later he awoke one morning to find the wind fallen, the sun shining, and his sickness gone. He ate a late breakfast in his cabin, and then proceeded on deck. For these two or three days he had experienced more physical and mental suffering than he had hitherto believed it possible for one man to endure; and if he could have got at Henderson during certain paroxysms of his suffering, it is quite likely that he would have abased himself to the uttermost and have begged for a passage back to England at the very first opportunity. During these paroxysms he would have admitted anything—his own total unsuitability for grappling with the world, his own wayward obstinacy, simply anything. But Henderson had visited him only once—and then he had been too ill to speak at all. And now in harmony with a rapidly rising barometer his spirits were rising too—by leaps and bounds. He felt for the time being rejuvenated, fit to cope with anything. And a resolution that he had half formed was

thrust doggedly aside, a resolution to see Henderson and tell him plainly that he dreaded the fight for existence which awaited him in New Zealand. He imagined how mockingly Henderson would laugh at him, and he swore again and again that never would he admit himself in the wrong like that—no, not though his hope of salvation depended upon it.

The last lingering traces of his depression left him as he stepped upon the white scrubbed deck into the dazzling sunlight that sparkled everywhere. He drew a deep, long breath of the rare salt air, and it braced him like a glass of champagne. Half a dozen laughing, excited youngsters were playing at hide-and-seek round and about the ventilators. Farther forward a group of hatless middle-aged men were playing quoits like great overgrown schoolboys. The deck was sprinkled with chairs, many of which were already occupied. He found a vacant chair and sat down with a great show of nonchalance.

At first he was somewhat self-conscious, and busied himself with foolish speculations about how this new world into which he had forced himself was going to receive him. He feared that the story of his sickness had become the subject of gossip, and that his appearance in consequence would be the signal for pointed glances and covert smiles. But he need not have feared this. The fact was, most of the other passengers were also recovering from attacks similar to his. One by one, pale but relieved, they made their appearance on deck and sought chairs even as he had done. He could not help noticing how little singular he was. So presently his self-consciousness deserted him, and he gave himself up to ruffling it magnificently, and to observing.

It was only then that he realised that the chair next to his was occupied, and on glancing cautiously at its occupant he was quite gratified to recognise the tall, pale young woman whose hand-bag he had retrieved at Liverpool a few days before. Her head was slightly turned away from him, and she was entirely absorbed in a novel which she held with both her hands. So he had plenty of time to observe her critically, to verify the impressions he had first received of her.

As she was hatless, he noted in even greater detail her dark glossy hair, which was brushed smoothly back and fastened neatly above the nape of her neck. Her hands were long, and her tapering fingers were beautifully manicured. Her expression was grave, studious, and decidedly intellectual. There was a suggestion of unostentatious piety about her, he determined, perhaps even a faint suggestion of the blue-stocking. She conveyed the idea too that she was continually repressing something or the other; this air of repression is characteristic of Latin women of the upper classes. He admitted reluctantly that without doubt here was a woman of breeding, of wealth, and of culture—one, in fact, who lived upon a different plane of existence from his own.

She changed her position a trifle, and he noticed how quiet and graceful were her movements. Then he was detected before he could turn away, for she looked up suddenly. She gazed at him calmly and stedfastly for a few uncomfortable seconds, then she seemed to remember him, and smiled in a quite friendly manner.

"It has really cleared up now, hasn't it?" he remarked, covering his embarrassment with the first phrase that came into his head.

She turned fairly towards him.

"Why, yes," she replied, closing her book and dropping it upon the deck beside her. "Indeed it has. It's a good thing, too, don't you think? One feels it so depressing when everyone is ill. It's like being the sole survivor, isn't it?"

He hesitated, horribly conscious that he at any rate had been numbered with the majority, yet dreading lest if he revealed this fact he should fall at once in her opinion. Before, however, he could think of a non-committal reply, she went on:

"I have a friend who is a very great traveller. And, do you know, she keeps to her cabin almost whenever it's stormy, because she finds the deck and the saloon so terribly depressing with nearly everybody away."

His relief was so immense that his whole face brightened.

"Well," he said, speaking very casually, "that's decidedly odd. That you should mention your friend, I mean. That's my own case, now. I always do the same thing. I have kept more or less to my cabin for the last few days for that very reason."

"You're an experienced voyager, then?"

"Oh, well," he modestly qualified her assumption, "I wouldn't go as far as that. I have never done this little trip before, if that is what you mean. But as a matter of fact, I dare say I have knocked about a good deal."

"I know," she put in quickly. "The usual round? Paris, and Monte Carlo, and all that?"

"The usual round," he agreed.

There was a pause. Conversation flagged for a little, as it always is inclined to do at the initial stages of such an intimacy. Then:

"All the same," he went on, "I flatter myself I know most of the ropes. I never, if I possibly can avoid it,

spend even a night upon a boat without having a cabin to myself."

She nodded comprehendingly.

"Yes, I like that too. But it's not always easy to get, is it?"

He bent eagerly towards her.

"A mere matter of money," he dogmatised. "Believe me, it's all a matter of money—if you take it in time, that is. Have you managed to get a cabin to yourself, may I ask?"

She shot at him her sudden stedfast glance, and he fancied that she was faintly surprised at the question.

"Oh yes," she said at last, turning indifferently away.

And inwardly he cursed himself for not having better guarded his tongue. He had made a slip, had perhaps said something that a genuine member of her class would not have said. Of course she would have a cabin to herself. Of course she would! He was wondering desperately if the conversation was supposed to be over, if he should rise and leave her. But at that moment something happened to distract him. Two individuals detached themselves from the crowd that had by now assembled, and came towards him.

One of them was clearly some kind of an official, and was obviously heralding the other. But this other was a passenger, and he made so vivid an impression upon Grant's mind, so quick an impression too—Grant had an accurate mental picture of him within the first ten seconds—that it would be well to describe him exactly as he crossed the deck with a slow, deliberate tread that Grant was to learn to hate. He was a big man of about fifty, one of those aggressively healthy-looking men who are apt to irritate you. He was dressed in dark

grey flannel, and was wearing a cap of much the same shade. His arms swung by his sides, and he carried his weight without the slightest stoop. And a short luxuriant black moustache was the only hair upon a potentially hirsute face the expression of which was cheerful, resolutely cheerful (you felt) under all circumstances. He was quite an arresting figure. There was a purposeful, forceful air about the man.

As they drew close, the official (who was a deck-steward, had Grant but known it) stopped, and, turning to his companion, addressed him in a low, rapid, apologetic voice. Then without more ado he came up to Grant.

"This is not your chair, I think, if you'll excuse me, sir," he said all in a breath.

Grant, of course, scrambled instantly to his feet, and blushed hotly. He was overcome with shame, that hard upon his assumption of experience he should thus be exposed, apparently ignorant of the fact that each passenger had his special chair.

"I'm sorry——" he was beginning loudly.

But the steward suavely interrupted him :

"That's right, sir. See, there you are, sir."

He pointed to the back of the chair, and Grant now perceived that a card was fastened upon it which bore the name : "Mr. Alfred Govan."

"Perhaps you haven't found your own chair yet, sir?" the steward suggested. "If you'll tell me the name, sir——"

"Grant," said Grant sulkily. "John Horton Grant."

"Oh yes," said the steward eagerly. "I've put you beside your friend, sir—beside Dr. Henderson. Will that be all right, sir?"

Grant nodded haughtily, and was about to move off.

But before he could do so, the big man, whose chair he had been usurping, came forward.

"Now, Mr. Grant," he said in a mellow intelligent voice, "don't let me disturb you. I'm several days' march nearer home than you, but I do know how young people hate to be disturbed. Keep my chair for just as long as you want."

Grant murmured something to the effect that "he couldn't possibly think of it." But the other was insistent.

"Oh yes, you can," he replied. "Please sit down."

"But aren't you Mr.—Mr. Govan?" Grant began. And :

"I am that man," said Mr. Govan. "But Mr. Govan can't manage to be in two places at one and the same time. And he's going down below just now to have a glass of milk. So sit down and enjoy yourself while you're young. I shan't be back for nearly fifteen minutes, and that will be time enough for my chair."

He placed a hand upon Grant's shoulder and forced him deliberately back into the chair he had vacated. Then he marched off, followed immediately by the steward. Grant turned half doubtfully towards his neighbour, thinking that perhaps his mistake about the chair might have rendered her colder than ever. But, greatly to his relief, she had become quite friendly again, quite ready to talk.

"He's very kind, don't you think?" she said. "Isn't he?"

"Yes, he seems rather a good sort," Grant agreed.

"I wonder, now!" she went on thoughtfully. "What do you suppose he does?"

Then, as Grant was silent:

"You know, I'm not in the least curious—in the

ordinary sense of the word. I mean, I'm not idly curious. But all humanity is so very fascinating, don't you think? I have so often felt that I should like to write a book."

Grant nodded sympathetically, and she went on:

"You are very lucky to have such a friend. The steward did say, didn't he, that Dr. Henderson was your friend?"

"Do you know him?" asked Grant, suddenly on the defensive.

But she shook her head:

"Oh no, indeed! But of course I know him by reputation. And he was pointed out to me the very first day out. No one so famous as he can expect to travel incognito, can they?"

"Well," said Grant doubtfully, "I suppose not."

The fact was, he was a trifle bewildered. He had hitherto had no idea that Henderson was such a well-known character. And furthermore he was nervous again. The conversation had taken a risky turn, and he feared lest a careless answer of his might reveal, or at least give a hint of the real relationship that existed between Henderson and himself.

"No, I suppose not," he presently repeated. "Oh yes, Henderson and I are travelling out together."

"I should be quite glad to meet him. That is, if you think—"

"I'm certain of it," he cut in gallantly.

She gave him the quick, straight glance that was so characteristic of her. Then she smiled a little.

"You know, I have rather an unfair advantage of you, Mr. Grant," she said. "You don't know my name, but I know yours. I heard you give it to the steward just now. Well, my name is Ward."

He rose and acknowledged this information by a slight bow. He would have liked to suggest that his chair should be permanently shifted beside hers, but he feared she might resent the familiarity. Also, he would have liked to have prolonged the conversation, but he saw clearly that it was better to depart than to be dismissed. He was learning fast.

"I must hunt up Henderson, Miss Ward," he told her.

She nodded, then detained him for a second with one last question :

"Are you travelling for pleasure," Mr. Grant ?

"What ? Oh yes, for pleasure," he replied easily—and without the slightest hesitation.

### III

But his buoyancy did not last very long. Later in the day his spirits underwent the inevitable reaction, and he paced the spar-deck in a mood of black despondency. Here he was, like a lost soul permitted to taste the delights of heaven ere being cast for ever into hell ; here he was mixing with and accepted by the class of people for whose companionship he had always yearned—and the fact but increased the unrest which had haunted him all his later life. For he did not belong to that class. This was no modest consciousness of his own unworthiness, but a literal statement of a sad truth. If his sojourn amidst these easy-circumstanced pleasure-seekers had been likely to be a permanent one, he would without a doubt have considered himself vastly superior to any of them. But as it was, every day was a day nearer the end of the voyage, and when the voyage ended his brief career as a man of leisure ended too. Each new luxury that he encoun-

tered served only to remind him of the grim fight for existence which lay ahead of him—and for which he was quite incapable.

He wished he had travelled second instead of first class. He wished he had travelled steerage. He wished he had never come at all. He cursed himself because of his pride. He cursed Henderson because the latter had seen through him.

It was while he was in this mood that Henderson strolled leisurely towards him, quite unperceived. A touch upon the arm was the first warning he had, and he turned sharply, at once upon the defensive.

"Well," said Henderson mockingly, "have you had enough of facing life yet?"

Grant eyed him coldly and deliberately. All his deadly pride was up again in arms, and he would have died rather than give Henderson one bare hint of the panic and regret he was suffering.

"Are you sorry you've come?" asked Henderson bluntly.

Henderson was cynical and hedonistic, but he was not a bad fellow; he was very good-humoured. He had not the slightest pecuniary need to practise his profession, for he had inherited great wealth, which enabled him to indulge his every whim. But a scientific spirit had prompted him to study medicine, and, young though he was, he had already made an immense success of it. His friends told him he was eccentric, but he merely laughed at that. The fact was, he was obsessed by a mania for experiment; his greatest delight in life was to fire a train of outrageous possibilities in order to see what would happen. He was callous, perhaps, as every great experimenter must necessarily be. But he was anything but cruel. Thus,

if Grant had been frank with him at their first encounter, he never would have led him on. And if Grant even now had been frank with him and had admitted his weakness, he would certainly have used him gently and have set him on his feet in some trade or profession that he was capable of practising.

But Grant had blinded himself for so long and had posed so often that he was almost unable to be frank.

"Have I complained by either deed or word?" he demanded.

Henderson felt for his cigarette-case, critically selected a cigarette, and lit it.

"Not yet," he admitted, after a pause. "But then you've been awfully sick, haven't you?"

Grant ground his teeth at this unwelcome reminder. But he was silent. It was quite useless to deny the charge.

"Then am I to gather," said Henderson presently, "that you are still looking forward to facing real life when we get to New Zealand?"

"Yes," said Grant, plunging boldly. "I am. I ask nothing more than to be allowed to face life."

"And meantime you are enjoying the trip?"

"Certainly I am," answered Grant, turning his back. Henderson surveyed the back for a little.

"I see," he went on at last, "that my company jars you at the moment. I shall, therefore, remove myself. But I came to give you a word of warning. There's a man named Govan——"

"Why," cried Grant, startled into cordiality for a minute—"why," he cried, turning, "I know him! He has spoken to me!"

Henderson blew a chain of grey smoke-rings. Just where he stood, he was sheltered from the light breeze

that the ship created by her passage. Otherwise the air was so still that the smoke coiled and eddied above his head for quite a long time.

"I'm not surprised," he assented at last. "So far as I can make out, this man Govan makes it a point to speak to everyone on board—every man, woman, and child. He's a bore."

"He's nothing of the sort," said Grant hotly. "I consider he's exceedingly kind."

Henderson smiled persuasively.

"Now, my dear fellow," he pleaded, waving his cigarette before him with a deprecating air—"my dear fellow! Please don't be such a fire-eater. Really, you know, you haven't enough experience to judge——"

"I know who is in sympathy with me, and who is not," put in Grant.

Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "If you find this man Govan is in sympathy with you, cultivate him by all means. That's your affair. Only don't let him hook himself on to me through you. That's what I came to warn you about."

Then, as Grant was silent, he went on :

"You see, I know his type. He's one of the necessary evils of clubs, steamers, and long-distance trains. He has already approached the purser with a view to securing the smoking-room after dinner for a series of Gospel Meetings for Men. The answer, I need hardly tell you, was an emphatic negative, for the purser——"

But the remainder of Henderson's wisdom was wasted upon Grant, for the latter was deeply offended and ostentatiously turned away.

Mr. Govan's propensities, however, diagnosed more or less correctly by Henderson, were the means of breaking

the harmony which exists in theory among the passengers of a ship. This harmony exists only in theory. It is quite true that social distinctions are almost entirely forgotten, that everybody is graded according as his ticket is first-class, second-class, or steerage. But in place of social distinctions violent factions are apt to be formed over the most trivial questions. This seems very childish from a landsman's standpoint, but then the sea makes children, to a certain extent, of all those who sail upon its waters—and children are inclined to be trivial. Long before the Cape Verd Islands were sighted two great opposing camps had been formed on board, and the leader of one of these camps was Mr. Govan. One of the camps was defiantly frivolous, occupying the smoke-room mostly, where it gambled, drank Scotch whisky, and narrated stories suited to the smoke-room, but to nowhere else; needless to say, this camp comprised almost all the men on board, with the girls and just a few of the older and more experienced women on its fringe. The other camp, the camp which Mr. Govan led, was gravely and significantly censorious of frivolity, and was addicted to sensible clothes, intellectual pursuits, total abstinence, and prayer-meetings; this camp comprised a dozen or so of the older women, an occasional girl, a few men of Mr. Govan's way of thinking, and all the men whom the smoke-room party had cast out.

Grant in the end grew attached to Mr. Govan's party, out of necessity, not out of choice. At first he tried to fling himself into the idle, frivolous life of the smoke-room party with an earnestness that secretly amused Henderson. Yet there he was terribly unpopular, for the type to which he belonged never is popular with men. He had no sense of humour; he resented chaff as

he would have resented a mortal insult. So behind his back the men laughed at his dignified affectations, and in the smoke-room he was the source of many pointed, sly allusions. He was acutely aware of both these facts, but was unable to resent them properly. For his methods of retaliation were too point-blank; it was as if he were trying to fight wasps with a broadsword. For these reasons the smoke-room party soon became impossible for him. And there was another reason too, one beyond which there was no getting any farther—he had no money to spend upon frivolities, and he would not admit the fact.

So presently he grew offended with the bar and the smoke-room, and betook himself for solace to Mr. Govan. Everyone knows how sweet (but dangerously enervating) it is to revel in the flattery of a sympathetic friend. Mr. Govan treated him with a deference and a consideration that were delightful after the broad humours of the smoke-room. Perhaps Mr. Govan felt that consideration was due to a convert, perhaps he was slightly flattered at securing for his party a friend of the wealthy, popular, cynical Henderson. At any rate, Grant could always depend upon him for the exact soothing compliments that he desired. Mr. Govan was an ideal friend to have—if you never wanted to hear an honest criticism of yourself or a blunt home-truth.

"You can have no idea," he would say, breathing somewhat excitedly—"you can have no idea of the power of temptation. Life is full of terrible temptations. Oh, a man of my years has come across some terrible examples! Wine is a snare. And the terrible lure of sex is a terrible snare. And card-playing, and dancing, and theatricals—they're so many weapons of Satan. All you young people are very lucky to have ..

chosen the narrow path. Mr. Grant," he would conclude in his mellow intelligent voice—"Mr. Grant has chosen to cast in his lot with us, instead of with the frivolous—well, we'll mention no names. But he's to be congratulated on his choice, I think we must all agree."

This was at his study circles—"just a few young people and a Bible and Mr. Govan"—which he held on Wednesdays and Sundays in some quiet corner of the deck. On these occasions he certainly talked far too intimately about sin, but very likely he meant well, and there was nothing actually farcical in the words he used. Where the joke came in was in the matter of his audiences. Spectacled, solemn young men, like vegetables, and intellectual young women—these made up his audiences, and it was impossible to think of them as debauched young bloods and wanton butterflies, and desperately funny if you tried to do so.

At other times he would pace the deck with Grant, and talk more colloquially. He would fling an arm over Grant's shoulder and tell him again and again how well he understood him.

"Now, John," he would say, "I do understand young people. Don't you be frightened to confide in me. Just tell me all your troubles as if I was your father. I've told you that I am a father, haven't I? I have a real old-fashioned Christian home in Southport, and there's four young ladies there just now, who I shouldn't be surprised were thinking of their old father at this very minute. Lucy, Violet, Julia—and little Hetty. But there's no sons, so I shall just adopt you. Eh?"

As a matter of fact, he had already told Grant several times about his "old-fashioned Christian home in Southport." He told everyone about it, with an elaborate domestic detail that was sometimes embarrassing.

Still, Grant would smile and nod sympathetically, and feel vaguely comforted by the persuasive voice at his ear. And presently he would perhaps say :

" You'll notice, Mr. Govan, that I don't smoke, now?"

And Mr. Govan would squeeze his shoulder comprehendingly.

" That's right," he would reply. " There's nothing really wrong in it, of course. But it makes you thirsty. One thing leads to another. It's better to refrain."

As a matter of fact, Grant had stopped smoking because he had no more money wherewith to buy tobacco. . . .

He might have grown tired of the emasculated existence he was now leading had it not been for Miss Ward, who first showed up among Mr. Govan's followers by suddenly putting in an appearance at one of his "study circles." Grant had a tremendous respect for Miss Ward. She had been the first representative he had encountered of the brilliant world of fashion and money which he so admired, and he considered her uniquely typical of that world. Perfect frankness, perfect education, the leisurely easy assurance of one who has never known what it is to think about money—she had them all. He had not seen nearly as much of her as he had intended to see. He had managed to fulfil his promise and introduce Henderson to her—at an informal smoking-concert held one night in the saloon. Yet afterwards he was vexed that he had done so. Of course she belonged to Henderson's world, and as a consequence she had spent a good deal of time with Henderson and very little with him. Moreover, the weather had been ideal, temperate and calm, Pacific weather rather than Atlantic, and she had led a fairly active life. But now they sighted the Cape Verd Islands, like

dark clouds rising from the sea on the port bow. White muslins and flannels henceforth were the order of the day. She was forced to use her chair far more, and her chair was next to Mr. Govan's, so that Grant saw more of her.

"Most men like you," she said, with reference to Grant's championship of Mr. Govan—"most men like you, most wealthy men, sneer at religion. I suppose you have seen so much of the smart set that you have grown tired of them. But all the same, I think it is very splendid of you—that you should have the courage of your convictions, I mean."

Grant positively glowed under her flattery. She went on :

"You don't care about the usual sort of thing—dancing, all that?"

And Grant looked wise and murmured something to the effect that "he had seen too much of it."

This was after her first study circle. Latterly Mr. Govan left them alone a good deal ("Young people hate to be disturbed"), and they grew much more intimate.

"I'm so glad," she would say, "for your sake, that you have found a real friend like Mr. Govan. It is such a help to a man if he is young, don't you think? I don't mean that Dr. Henderson is a bad friend to you. Of course he's charming. But—well, I dare say I am old-fashioned, but I believe most deeply in Christianity. I love my religion. And Dr. Henderson is not a religious man, is he? And I don't think he cares much for company."

And in time she, too, called herself his friend. "You know, I'm not trying to be superior," she said. "But a woman sometimes knows more about life than a man of her own age. I am speaking as your friend, Mr. Grant. Why not give up this knock-about life? When

you go back to England you should buy a nice little place somewhere in the country. And then you should get married."

It was all very bewildering to Grant, and his head was completely turned. It gratified him, yet enraged him. He was delighted that a woman like this should accept him as one of her own caste. Yet he was wildly chagrined, too, because he was impotent to follow her advice, as he would only too readily have done.

#### IV

They had an uneventful crossing, and coasted down the South American seaboard for Rio de Janeiro. Perhaps the near approach of this fantastic port moved Grant to a fresh realisation of his position. In these days, at any rate, he grew languid. He lost interest in everything, even in his new friends, and suffered the voyage passively, spending his time beside Henderson in the chair which had been allotted to him at the beginning of the voyage. But he was not travelling restfully. As he sat staring at the sea, which was all of a dull uniformity, save where a lane of white water marked the track of the ship; as he sat deep in the sagging canvas of his chair staring at the sea, he seemed calm enough; and Henderson, glancing curiously now and then, wondered sometimes if he had misjudged him. But beneath his appearance of passivity he was boiling with rebellion and terror of the thing to which he had committed himself. To his excited imagination the whole ship seemed hostile, and every beat of her engines was like a blow, for it reminded him that little by little—irrevocably—he was drifting onwards to his fate. If Henderson had given him the slightest opportunity of withdrawing from his bargain with a show of dignity, he would have snatched at it. But Henderson

was silent. And so Grant was silent too. He could not sacrifice his pride.

The fine weather broke at last, and Grant awoke one morning to face a strong wind and a heavy sea. All that day he was frightened. He was not sick. Either he had found his sea-legs or he was too frightened. But he imagined he was experiencing a hurricane of the wildest sort, and he feared every minute lest the ship would founder. However, most of the other passengers were behaving as though nothing were going to happen, so he hid his fear beneath an appearance of great bravado, and went down to dinner that night outwardly as usual. But something did happen, after all. By this time the squall, such as it was, was at its height, and someone had forgotten to close the ventilators. And about halfway through dinner the ship's course was altered a trifle. The consequence was that a flood of turgid water poured down the ventilators, half drowning the diners and sweeping the tables clear.

The accident was alarming enough. A great many of the lights went out. Most of the women screamed, some of them fainted. For nearly ten minutes, Grant was certain that his last hour had come, that the ship had struck a rock, or turned turtle, or sprung a leak. True, an hour afterwards you could hardly have told that anything unusual had happened. But the incident served to put an end to Grant's passivity, for the next morning he sought Henderson in the smoke-room, and began to talk business with an elaborate air of being very practical and indifferent.

"I want to know," he demanded, "how farm-hands are paid in New Zealand. I suppose a man like I am can easily get a job. What wages should I expect? And what exactly would be my duties?"

Henderson, of course, was amazed. He had scarcely

expected Grant to get through the voyage without a collapse, and he had never expected him to face hard work in so purpose-like a fashion. He asked himself more searchingly than ever if he had judged Grant's character wrongly.

But the truth was, Grant had become desperate. The terrible fright he had received the previous evening had convinced him finally that he could not face a life of adventure, that he must get back to England and safety. He was not resigning himself to face life. Life had cornered him, and he was preparing to charge it, as a cowardly mongrel will at the last charge its persecutor in a desperate effort to win back to peace. He wanted above all else money wherewith he might return to England; and he was prevented from approaching Henderson for it by the same deadly failing which prevented him from giving Henderson even a hint of his panic. His only hope, he thought, was to work feverishly in New Zealand till he had enough laid by, and then to get out of New Zealand. So he told himself eagerly that his hardships were to be very brief, and relief of a sort came to him.

But Henderson knew nothing of all this. The leeward portholes were all open, of course, and he was sitting by one of them, negligently burning the inevitable cigarette. The sunlight stabbed through the porthole at an angle, lighting the pages of a book with which he was passing the time. He was idleness incarnate, a tremendous contrast to Grant's restlessness.

"Well," he replied, slowly lowering the book, "I'm hardly an authority upon the country. I'm going out to discover it, you see. But you might get about a pound a week. And, of course, you would have board and lodging free. And your duties—well, they would have all the charm of variety. Sweeping out the

stables, driving the milk to the station fifteen miles away, forking manure. Do these pastoral pursuits appeal to you, Grant?"

But Grant hardly noticed the sarcasm, for he was calculating rapidly; there was but one great single idea in his mind just then. He would have a pound a week. Then in about eighteen months he might be able to return to England. But the life would be one of torture. And eighteen months was a very long time. His white face and strained expression must have given Henderson to think, for he closed his book suddenly and sat forward with a real show of interest.

"Anything else?" he asked curiously.

Grant shook his head rather hopelessly. He was trying to persuade himself that eighteen months would pass rapidly, and that he would be able to endure for that time. But something logical within him kept insisting that eighteen months would last—for eighteen months. And the prospect of even a fortnight's hard manual labour filled him with dismay. . . . He became abruptly aware that Henderson was speaking.

"I have a cousin," he was saying—"a cousin out there, you know. That's partly why I am going out. I quite imagine he would take you on."

"Thank you," said Grant, formal to the last. "Of course, I might get something better, however."

Henderson studied him still more intently.

"You know, Grant, you're not looking well," he observed suddenly.

Grant started, and an eager light flashed into his eyes. Here, perhaps, was a chance of escape. If he could persuade Henderson that he was ill, the future might yet be made smooth for him.

But his eagerness must have been too apparent. Henderson must have guessed his thought. At all

events, he relapsed immediately into his old way of speaking.

"There's nothing really the matter with you," he said coldly. "But you see far too much of that ass Govan. He's enough to make anybody look unwell."

Grant was bitterly disappointed, yet he could not show it. So he hid his disappointment under a pretence of honest anger.

"Mr. Govan, please remember, is my friend," he said loftily. "But you have no sense of fairness, Dr. Henderson. Miss Ward says——"

He broke off in confusion, and Henderson laughed mockingly.

"Yes, go on. What does Miss Ward say? Nothing complimentary, I am quite sure, for I couldn't stand the girl at any price. Please don't present me to any more of your friends, Grant. I don't like them."

"Miss Ward," cried Grant hotly, "is as good as you. And she is even richer than you. And Mr. Govan—you condemn a man wholesale because his aims don't agree with yours."

"Oh no, I don't," replied Henderson promptly. "Only when he makes a parade of his aims. When he's ostentatiously virtuous on the strength of them."

"You insinuate that he's a hypocrite, then?"

Henderson merely shrugged.

"Whereas he's a saint."

"Oh no, he's not," said Henderson. "I've found out all about him. He's an electrical engineer, and a very clever one too. This Gospel business is only his hobby. You see, he's lazy; he doesn't work much now. He's been sharp enough to marry a wealthy woman, and so he's escaped going through the mill. Upon my word, you seem quite horrified! Another disillusionment, eh? You make an interesting study, Grant."

But Grant was not in the least horrified. What Henderson had supposed to be horror was really wild relief—the first genuine relief Grant had felt since that uncomfortable evening in Cumberland when the tenor of his life had been so drastically altered. He dismissed for ever all thoughts of toiling in New Zealand for eighteen months. That, he now frankly told himself, was impossible. Eighteen months seemed as terrible a sentence as a lifetime. Henderson's gossip concerning Mr. Govan's marriage for money had suggested a better way to Grant, a far easier way. He was handsome and irresistible. He too might marry money, and thus escape the mill which was certain to break him.

Does this decision of his seem too far-fetched, too abrupt? The naked truth generally does seem too far-fetched, yet it is a fact that in real life men jump at tremendous conclusions off very slender premises. Processes are never quite as deliberate and logical as they are in fiction. You will be astonished at your own inconsequence if you consider how impulsively you have dashed at nearly all the great decisions of your life. Moreover, it is a truism to say that a drowning man will clutch at any straw. It is quite natural; it is not surprising that this should be so. What, perhaps, is surprising is the comfort so many drowning men seem to derive from their straws. But then it must be remembered that so many men are extremists—like John Horton Grant. The faintest shadow of trouble was generally enough to cast him into the depths of despair. And the most fitful ray of hope was enough to drive him out of that despair, to promote the most unwarrantable assumption in his mind. . . .

So he felt gay, almost recklessly gay, for nothing seemed more delightful than this scheme to marry money.

## CHAPTER IV

### MAN PROPOSES

#### I

A DAY or two later he became aware that the ship was charged with a subtle electric atmosphere. Officers, crew, and passengers showed their consciousness of it by an under-current of excitement, and the ship herself was different somehow. Ships are like violins, live creatures almost, very sensitive to their environment.

The ship was thrilling to the message that land was sending her. Land lay ahead at last. She would call at Rio de Janeiro late on the following evening. And though most of the passengers were fixtures for the whole trip, the near prospect of land disturbed them quite as naturally and unsuspectedly as an approaching thunderstorm would have done. Nobody settled to anything in particular that day. There was a tendency towards unnecessarily spasmodic conversations. And off and on they would all drift forward to the starboard rail, whence they would scan the misty blue horizon—as if they hoped for a glimpse of the land which was still three or four hundred miles off !

A common cause of excitement is a great bond, since it naturally creates that fellow-feeling which makes men kind. All day the passengers were kind to one another, and they seemed to have an understanding among themselves and to have lost much of their reserve. Quite possibly it was only a manifestation of this new spirit

of natural frankness. But as they sat down to dinner that night—as though it were a great friendly family dinner—Miss Ward happened to catch Grant's eye for a second. And she smiled quickly and intimately to him, as if to acknowledge some happy secret between them.

Even when he was in despair the nightly shipboard meal always elated him—at least temporarily. He had never managed to get used to the pleasant novelty of nightly evening-dress. To-night; as usual, he was acutely conscious of his own good looks, of the impression he was sure he made in his clean new clothes. And to-night she was very elegant, elegant in her quiet, well-bred way, in a black spangled frock which he had never seen before. And in the second while her glance held his it came to him like an inspiration that she had all the requisite qualifications for his bride. It seemed to him that he could never do better.

He deliberately ignored the plain fact that she was a year or two his senior. That was nothing. He was not a love-sick boy marrying out of passion. Money was what he wanted, and she had it plentifully. And she had far more besides. Tact, breeding, piety, sympathy with his beliefs, experience of the world—all these would make his life pleasant if he married her. Her position was established beyond question; it would be a tremendous feather in his cap to carry off a prize like this. As the full realisation of her desirability soaked into his mind, he could almost persuade himself that she loved him. . . .

Love? What was love? Something fantastic that poets sang, something incomprehensible. But in the practical everyday world it merely meant that a man was attracted by a woman. He was desperately attracted by her. Well, then, he loved her. . . .

At this point he sighed and refused wine from a steward—some jolly soul was standing his table champagne—with as close an imitation as he was able to muster of Miss Ward's quiet delicate decision. Perhaps he was going ahead quickly, letting his imagination run riot. There was no sense whatever in aiming too high. This did not mean that he considered she was too good for him. Simply, modesty did not exist for him. He would have seen nothing extravagant in aspiring to a goddess. And he had no doubts but that Miss Ward would consider him eligible as far as his personal qualifications were concerned. Yet he feared that with one whose social position was so secure there might be awkward formalities to be gone through which would involve the exposure of his own dismal poverty. He had never actually formed a picture of the woman he was seeking, but if he had he would have fancied her as some wealthy vulgarian, the daughter of some newly enriched family which would be dazzled by the refinement of his manners.

But he pondered his scheme critically, and could find no serious flaw in it. His vanity was so colossal, he was so deadly earnest in his egoism, that it seemed to him quite reasonable to suppose himself irresistible. He soberly believed that he could make any woman love him if he set his mind to it. He would drop his handkerchief. She would pick it up. He would be able to escape all the hardships which his bargain with Henderson had involved—and not only would he escape them, but he would do so with honour. He could then say with all apparent sincerity—even with resignation: "I am sorry. I wanted a tussle with life. I was going to have it. But love has come to me unexpectedly—as it always does. You see how I am placed. My duty is

to the woman I love. I must have her beside me, and I cannot drag her into the grim battle I was looking forward to waging. I must just sacrifice my plans for roughing it, and go back to a life of ease for her sake." The moral aspect of his project did not in the least disturb him, for he was far too busy with himself to trouble about moral aspects.

## II

And then came further difficulties. To begin with, you must have money before you can get money. The paradox of this was peculiarly irritating to him, yet its truth was painfully obvious. And then it had by now slowly dawned upon him that there was a certain difficulty in getting acquainted with heiresses. In the case of the average heiress a man might as well be a hundred miles from her as beside her, unless he had a letter of introduction. And, finally, it was by no means easy to discern an heiress. All women were not as pointedly labelled as Miss Ward.

Considerations like these made for a restless night. It was very late ere sleep came to him, and he woke up in the morning with the sharpness of his despair blunted, but with a heavy consciousness of uneasiness—worry and uneasiness. Henderson chose this as an opportunity for asking him if he had decided yet to accept his offer of a farm on which to work. But he merely replied frigidly that "he had not been able to come to a satisfactory decision." Mr. Govan came to him in the course of the morning and, stedfastly cheerful, invited him to read over various letters from his children. ("From my young people in Southport, you know. Lucy, Violet, Julia—and little Hetty. Did I ever tell you about

them?"") But to Mr. Govan's utter astonishment, his disciple was rebellious for once. Grant muttered testily that "he had no time for that sort of thing just now," and then he had turned his back with unmistakable purpose.

He had grown nearly as despondent now as he used to be. But in the late afternoon Miss Ward came across him, and she was so cool and sympathetic and candid that his spirits rose again as by magic. And then a second inspiration came to him, so brilliant that he visibly started. The young woman was clearly enough in love with him, madly in love with him; she could not keep away from him. In a moment her whole heart was regularly illuminated for him; he was reverential at his own perspicacity. And yet it was natural enough that she should be so, and (when he came to think of it) startlingly obvious.

Before the glow of thankfulness that the knowledge brought him, his two remaining difficulties melted like snow before a furnace. They must be married on board before they reached Wellington, for that would prevent awkward inquiries and discoveries about his circumstances. For the preliminaries to this step he would probably need some money. If he told his case to Henderson in the would-be straightforward fashion he had already rehearsed, Henderson would almost certainly give him money.

He sought Henderson then and there in a perfect fever of impatience.

He found him abaft the promenade deck, lounging over the rail and gazing down upon the busy life of the steerage. At this time of day the steerage deck was pretty well crowded with emigrants, most of whom were eating. There was something rather pathetic in the

unconscious way they clung to the habits of a lifetime. As far as possible, they made their new life like the old one at home. Family groups had spread shawls upon the deck and squatted picnicking on these, as though they were picnicking in a public park in England. Gaunt solitary men with threadbare coats buttoned to their chins supported the rail, as though it were the street wall to which they had hitherto been used. A noisy bunch of dirty children, with many ululant cries, played some intricate game for which they had chalked the deck into squares, as though it were the pavement of their native slums. Human nature is a queer thing, very conservative, after all.

Henderson was in a meditative frame of mind, a sober frame of mind, quite unusual in him. As Grant joined him, he waved his hand expressively towards the scene below.

"I find it good to watch them sometimes," he said. "It keeps me from forgetting that everyone is not rich. Study them, Grant. They're worth it."

Grant murmured ungraciously that "he would have thought it a depressing kind of thing to do," and that anyway "there was nothing specially attractive in a lot of beggars."

At this a sparkle of amusement gleamed in Henderson's eye. Returning more to his old mocking style, he went on :

"I see you don't think they're worth it. Well, study these solitary men, at least. What do you suppose will become of most of them in New Zealand? Farm-hands, Grant. Now do you find them more interesting?"

Grant shivered at the implied resemblance he bore to these derelicts. It was perfectly reasonable of Henderson. He, Grant, was nothing, after all, but an emigrant.

Yet he pretended not to notice Henderson's thinly veiled sarcasm.

"That's what I wanted to speak about," he said.  
Henderson nodded.

"Of course," went on Grant, "it's very good of you to trouble about my future. But I'm sorry I shall not be able to accept your offer about your cousin's farm."

Henderson tilted his head to one side and looked at him quizzically.

"Why?" he at length inquired. "Whence this sudden independence. Do you propose instead to buy a farm? Or have you been offered the Governor-Generalship—by wireless?"

Grant shook his head:

"Something quite different. Something simpler." Henderson straightened himself abruptly.

"Oh," he said, with a sudden change of manner. "So there really is something? Well, we can't talk here. Come to my state-room."

Without further comment, he led the way smartly to his state-room. He motioned Grant to a chintz-covered armchair that stood beside a small table. His natural orderliness was well shown by the evening things which were already laid neatly out upon the narrow bed against the hour when he would dress. He lifted them, placed them carefully to one side, then sat down upon the edge of the bed.

"Now, what exactly are you driving at, Grant?" he asked very coldly.

Grant, sitting bolt upright with an arm resting upon each arm of the chair, wriggled uneasily. He moistened his lips. He did not care for the flavour of cross-examination that Henderson was imparting to the proceedings.

"Well," he said at last, "the fact of the matter is, I

have had to alter my plans. I—I won't be doing any kind of work in New Zealand, I expect."

"I don't remember that you had any plans," said Henderson sternly. "I remember a bargain you made with me, if that is what you mean. I was to pay your first-class expenses to Wellington. And in return you were to face life there."

Grant nodded eagerly several times, trying to interrupt.

"I know, I know!" he got in at last. "Don't imagine for a moment that I should dream of denying it. Only, we'll have to cancel the bargain, I'm afraid."

Henderson was silent, so he went on :

"I'm afraid we'll have to cancel the bargain. I'm sorry. I was looking forward to a good keen struggle. I was making all my plans. But"—he shrugged effectively—"I'm afraid we'll have to call it off."

"Why?" asked Henderson bluntly. "Have you got frightened at the prospect at last?"

"Now, I don't think I deserve that," said Grant in an injured tone. "Upon my word, Dr. Henderson, you're presuming too much! Here we are at the other side of the Atlantic, and I've never complained once to you, never so much as hinted that I wanted to back out." He leaned back, deliberately forcing himself into an easier posture, then went on loftily: "I told you in England that I was not a coward, but you wouldn't believe me. I should have thought I had proved it by now. Look how I jumped at your offer to go to New Zealand. But seemingly you still won't believe me." He joined his hands persuasively and concluded: "Dr. Henderson, look a little deeper. Does it not occur to you that I might have been looking forward with zest to the glorious tussle that awaited me in New Zealand?"

I, a young man in the—the strength of his youth? You don't appear to realise that a strong independent nature likes a fight. Men like me don't want charity, we want work. Does it not occur to you that I was counting on hard work?"

Henderson shook his head. But Grant by now had warmed to his subject, was carried away by the beauty of the part he had set himself to play.

"Then, does it not occur to you," he went on without heeding—"does it not occur to you that there are higher motives than those of mere personal gain? That a man may be called upon to sacrifice his plans for very decency's sake? That a man must sink his pride at times—for the sake of someone else?"

Again Henderson shook his head. Slightly damped, Grant made his announcement:

"I am—in love, Dr. Henderson."

If he expected Henderson to make some decisive sign here, he was disappointed. If he expected Henderson to be overcome by emotion, to wring him comprehendingly by the hand, to beg him to say no more, he was bitterly disappointed. Henderson merely lit a cigarette with rather elaborate fastidiousness, and then smoked silently for a second or two.

"I am in love," repeated Grant more firmly.

"Well," said Henderson at this, "I hear you say it. The fact as such may or may not be of interest. But what, please, has it got to do with all you've been saying?"

"Why," cried Grant, almost genuinely shocked, "everything, of course! Surely you see how I am placed. It's all very well for a single man to go roughing it by himself in the backwoods of New Zealand. But he can't take his wife. It would be monstrous cruelty. My duty

is to the woman I love. She must have me beside her, and I cannot drag a delicate, sensitive, gently-born woman into what would be misery for her—actual danger, maybe."

"And so you want me to call our bargain off?"

"I should have thought," said Grant, somewhat impudently, "that any gentleman would call it off without being asked—under the circumstances."

Henderson disregarded this, however.

"And who is the paragon?" he asked mockingly.

"Miss Ward," replied Grant sulkily.

At last Henderson was roused.

"Miss Ward?" he repeated sharply.

Grant inclined his head.

"But Miss Ward is a woman of means," said Henderson coldly. "You know that, for you mentioned it yourself some time ago. Do you, an absolute pauper, propose to marry a woman like that——"

"I know!" put in Grant here. "But haven't I already told you that I love her? Am I able to control that? I should have thought that you, a doctor, would understand about these things. Love has come upon me unexpectedly, as it always does——"

Henderson cut him short with an exclamation of disgust.

"Love! Drop that nonsense, if you please, Grant! You know perfectly well that you don't care a button for her. You're a mercenary, cold-blooded young villain!"

Grant stood up, trembling with suppressed passion and scowling darkly. He was raging with vexation because Henderson had seen through him so easily.

"I understand," he muttered sneeringly. "I—I quite understand. Jealousy . . ."

Again Henderson exclaimed impatiently.

"That's another lie," he said, "and you know it. I'm not in the least interested in Miss Ward. I don't like her, in fact. But that's no reason why I should approve of a conspiracy against her. She's just at the age when romance is tempting to a woman. She's just old enough to be afraid romance is going to leave her in the lurch. She's been accustomed to money all her life as a matter of course, probably does not dream about the underworld which breeds fortune-hunters like you. And you are just the sort of man to win her heart—and break it—"

"Stop!" cried Grant, who was thoroughly enraged this time.

But :

"I'll do nothing of the kind," replied Henderson. "I've brought you here under false pretences. I suppose, in a sense, I'm responsible for you. It's a confounded nuisance. But you will force me to go to her, to tell her the truth about you—"

"And be the talk of the whole ship!" Grant put in quickly. Necessity is the mother of invention, and he was quick to play upon Henderson's meticulousness, his dislike of sentiment and fuss. He saw, too, by Henderson's involuntary frown that his shot had found its mark. He went on rapidly before Henderson could interrupt :

"Oh, I can tell you, Dr. Henderson, I have friends of my own by this time! They will stand by me, too. You don't expect that all the passengers will believe you aren't jealous? What do you think they will say that your motive is for interfering? Yes"—and he pressed his advantage still farther—"and I shall tell them that you *are* jealous! And I don't care what you say, most of them will believe me. You say you don't like Miss

Ward. Well, your name will be coupled with hers. You may even have to marry her——”

“That’s absurd, of course,” said Henderson.

It was. Grant perceived that he had gone too far, and so he wisely returned to the bounds of the probable :

“Well, your name will be coupled with hers. That won’t be pleasant for you, will it?”

Henderson pulled at his cigarette and reflected upon this for a little. Finally :

“Two or three weeks ago,” he remarked, “when I found you out in Cumberland—do you remember? There was a fat hysterical man with you there named—Hawkins, I think. You will grow to be like Hawkins when you are old.”

Grant said nothing, so he went on :

“I’m very much disappointed in you, Grant. It’s not that I believed in your courage. I never did. I expected that you might break down long before this. But you haven’t broken down honestly. You’ve tried to escape what you are pledged to go through with by a wretchedly obvious subterfuge. Now get out of my cabin, if you please. And don’t come back again.”

Henderson stood up on this and dropped the stump of his cigarette into an ash-tray.

“But I demand to know your intentions,” said Grant. “What do you mean to do?”

“Dress,” said Henderson, beginning to take off his coat.

Grant sneered.

“You know perfectly what I refer to. What are you going to do about this affair of mine, that I told you in confidence?”

“I refuse to admit that you told me in confidence,” said Henderson. “But as a matter of fact, I shall do

nothing unless I'm asked. Then I shall tell the truth. You can go to the devil in your own way, Grant. I'm quite finished with you."

### III

When Grant burst out of that cabin the sun was already sinking into the sea. Over the calm of the sea it was reflected like a long shimmering coppery path, and it filled the western sky with delicate rosy colour. From the west, too, blew the faintest of breezes—a warm land-breeze laden with the scents of the land. From the east a great shadow was slowly creeping up the sky, and it was to the east that Grant turned, as if it harmonised better with his mood of anger.

But he was fearful as well as angry; fear had come suddenly upon him as he stood before Henderson in the latter's cabin. Quite mysteriously had it come down upon him. He had been struck in a flash with horror, like a naked sleep-walker on awaking suddenly in the midst of a crowd. In a flash he had felt as if Henderson were a magician who could read his every private thought. He had felt as though with every minute he remained in that cabin he yielded up some fresh secret of his life. So he had rushed impetuously from the cabin, without another word of defence.

With actual tears in his eyes, he had hurried down the promenade deck, to become aware of Mr. Govan looming up ahead, with his big impassive face as resolutely cheerful as usual. Mr. Govan was probably on his way to dress for dinner. That he had not forgotten how Grant had snubbed him was proved by the manly Christian forgiveness which shone in his face as he passed. Now, however, he was the incarnation of all the soothing

flattery for which Grant's ruffled dignity yearned. Grant literally rushed upon him—like a starved whelp rushing upon its dam for nourishment.

"Mr. Govan, Mr. Govan!" he cried, catching him by one arm.

"Well, now, what is it?" Mr. Govan was beginning to reply in his mellow, intelligent voice. Then he noticed Grant's real agitation, and his breathing grew heavy and excited. "What is it?" he repeated, but in a very different tone.

Grant tried to pull himself together, and by a great effort partly succeeded. He perceived that he must not express himself too much—or he might be properly understood.

"This morning," he muttered awkwardly, "I'm afraid I answered you shortly——"

Mr. Govan held out his hand.

"Say no more, my boy," he breathed sensuously. "Young people are always hasty. I hope the Lord will forgive me some day, so thank Heaven I know how and when to forgive." He shook Grant's hand fervently, then dropped it. "Say no more."

These preliminaries—quite as devoid of sincerity as the ceremonial of coffee which prefaces the transaction of business in the East—these meaningless preliminaries over, Grant went on tremulously, for he was still excited :

"You—said once you would help me if ever I needed."

Mr. Govan looked intently into Grant's eyes, with a great air of comprehension.

"You must speak to me," he said at last, "as though you were one of my own young people in Southport. I think I may have told you about my young people. Lucy, Violet, Julia—and little Hetty. Sure you may be that I shall understand, John. I am a father."

Grant searched for words, but before he could find them the other went on :

"Is it some sudden yielding to temptation? Some terrible sin that the hot flesh has forced you to commit? There, you see, I understand all about such things. Have you had a partner in your sin? Or was it when you were alone? At night, perhaps? In a fit of desperate impulse?"

His tone had grown eager and sibilant, very passionate, too. He leaned slowly forward, so that Grant felt his hot breath upon his cheek.

"No, no," said Grant hurriedly. "Nothing like that, Mr. Govan. You know me better than that. I would sooner die than disgrace myself in that way."

Mr. Govan drew back, but he seemed almost disappointed, somehow. He half closed his eyes, expelled his breath through his nose in a deep sigh, caught up Grant's left hand, and began to stroke it rapidly.

"Brave lad, brave lad," he said in a queer sing-song voice. "What's the matter, then? Tell old Mr. Govan what's the matter. What's the matter?"

The rapid, regular patting still continued, and under it Grant began to feel positively hypnotised.

"I've fallen in love, Mr. Govan," he said, catching something of the other's conspiring manner.

"That's right. That's as it should be. You've fallen in love. Who with?"

"Miss Ward."

"That's right, that's right. A true child of the Lord. A true daughter of Emmanuel. And she loves you in return? You've spoken your heart to her?"

"Not yet. But I—well, I may say quite modestly that I'm certain she loves me."

"Of course she does! That's right. She'll make you

a true wife. Something has happened to come between you?"

At this point an idea came to Grant for overcoming part at least of his difficulties.

"Henderson," he said, making up his mind all of a sudden.

"Dr. Henderson has come between you?"

"Not exactly. At least—I don't know," said Grant. "Of course I know him very well. But he has a very disagreeable nature, very disagreeable."

"He is of the world," said Mr. Govan. "Not a follower of the straight and narrow path. He scoffs at those within the fold."

"I don't say it's jealousy," went on Grant. "I shouldn't like to say positively it was jealousy. Yet he seems to resent my—my feelings towards Miss Ward. He wants to prevent my marriage. And I expected he would lend me ten pounds."

At this Mr. Govan let go of Grant's hand and opened his eyes. The spell upon Grant was broken, and he considered his last words in a panic, lest they might have afforded Mr. Govan the proper key to the situation. Determined at all costs to counteract their effect, he explained himself with pitiful anxiety :

"Of course, ten pounds is a small enough amount to Henderson"—he laughed embarrassedly—"or to me either. It was just until we reached Wellington." Hardly conscious of the monstrous lie he was telling, he concluded : "I left home without enough, but they will have sent it to Wellington for me. You see, Mr. Govan? I'm expecting a—a draft at Wellington. And meanwhile——"

"And meanwhile Mr. Govan gets the cold shoulder because of Dr. Henderson's shortcomings. Ah, young people, young people!"

Grant was tremendously relieved at the way things were going.

"I have already told you how sorry——" he was beginning. But Mr. Govan cut him short:

"I know, I know! Not another word, John. You are so much in love with her that you can't speak of anything else? Can't think of anything else? Isn't that it?"

Grant assented to this, and the other went on:

"Ah, you see how I understand! You love every bit of her, don't you?"

Grant nodded.

"Every bit of her," repeated Mr. Govan, becoming once again excited. "Her hair? And her eyes? And her lips? And her whole body?"

"Oh yes," said Grant confidently.

The other placed a heavy compelling hand upon his shoulder and bent slightly towards him.

"When I was a lad like you," he said, "I was serving my apprenticeship. There were two big dynamos in the works where I was articled. And they throbbed—like my heart when I thought of my marriage. You know? You feel like that?"

"Just that," said Grant gravely.

"You feel that you'll love her for ever, don't you? That you could never love again?"

"Not if I lived to be a hundred."

Mr. Govan withdrew his hand.

"Ah, you see how I understand!" he declared triumphantly. "I've seen it coming on. You're made for her. And you shall have her, John. I'll help you."

"You will?"

"I'll advance you the money that your so-called friend refused you."

Grant made some quick exclamation of relief, but before he could speak coherently the other went on :

"That's nothing. I'll do more for you than that. Watch over both of you. See that nothing comes between you or separates you."

Grant held out his hand with a dramatic show of abandonment, and Mr. Govan shook it many times.

"Well, now," he said in his mellow, intelligent voice, "we've come to an understanding, haven't we? Put your trust in the Lord—and in His humble follower, Mr. Govan. And there's no time like the present. You must speak your heart to her at once."

#### IV

But it was a few hours later ere Grant prepared to exploit for Miss Ward the hideous travesty of what was really in his heart.

Once before, on the evening he had first met Henderson, he had fainted—solely because his emotions had proved too much for him. To-night he did not faint. But he was physically sick through excitement, and quite unnecessarily concerned about this sickness—since he was hypochondriac too. For once the prospect of dinner jarred upon him, so he made no effort to dress; he did not put in an appearance at dinner. Instead he paced the limited floor-space of his cabin in a nervous, highly wrought condition which exhilarated him for the moment, but for which he would certainly pay the following morning by a spell of depression. "I'll manage it," he kept muttering to himself at intervals; "I'll carry it through."

It was close upon nine o'clock when his resolutions came to boiling-point, when they drove him at last to seek

Miss Ward and get the business settled. Curiously enough, she was standing almost exactly where Henderson had stood when he had sought him out in the late afternoon. A radiant moon, like a great round cheese, was hung suspended, just overhead, it seemed.

The night was breathless, and the ship cut smoothly through a silver sea. Music and men's laughter, softened by distance, sounded fitfully from the direction of the smoke-room. On that part of the deck there was no one but Miss Ward. And a light silver-coloured scarf was wrapped loosely over her shoulders, rendering her in harmony with the spirit of the night.

She was lost in reverie; perhaps she was enchanted by the spirit of the night, so she did not notice Grant till he actually stood beside her. She seemed glad to see him, however, raising her eyes to his for a moment with that swift, candid glance of hers, and smiling frankly.

"It's wonderful, don't you think?" she said softly. "On such a night as this—" She broke off with a little laugh: "But Shakespeare has said that so much better than I."

He did not answer, so she went on:

"But perhaps, Mr. Grant, you have a headache? I noticed you weren't at dinner. There's nothing much wrong, I hope?"

He shook his head quickly:

"Oh no; I was tired of it all. I get tired sometimes, and like to think of all the toiling masses." A memory of Henderson came to him, and he added sadly: "It keeps you from forgetting that everyone is not rich."

"I know," she murmured quickly.

He hesitated for a moment. Then:

"I was lonely too," he said.

She was perfectly silent at this, gazing steadily out beyond the ship at the moonlight sea. He was really anxious to play up to her mood, so he tried to seem to understand it. He pointed at the sea.

"It's like the world," he said, rather clumsily, but in a would-be profound manner. "It's like the world. Deep here, shallow there."

She shivered ever so slightly, and looked for a second rather old.

"It's like the world," she said, "because it's indifferent, so terribly indifferent."

He was puzzled at this, and somewhat dismayed as well. However, he strove to wring a compliment out of the idea.

"The world could never be indifferent to you," he told her. "I am perfectly certain of that. But, of course, I see what you mean," he went on quickly, lest she should think him lacking in wit. "The world is kind to people like us, who have our advantages. And indifferent to paupers and adventurers. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Oh, yes," she assented, still gazing at the sea.

He nodded wisely several times. There was a really long pause. The fact was, he had no notion what he should say next. A score of seemingly clever beginnings rose as far as his lips, but were there cut short because at the last they seemed too vapid. His lips twitched, and he fidgeted a little.

She drew her light wrap closer about her shoulders, and then straightened herself.

"I think I must write some letters," she said.

And this made him desperate.

"No," he said, quite unconsciously putting out an arm to stop her passage. "No, don't go yet. I've come out here to talk to you. I—want to talk to you."

She became at this very quiet again, and he, emboldened by her stillness, went on :

"Are you lonely, too?"

She hesitated. Then :

"Yes," she said slowly.

His heart throbbed with exultation.

"And I am lonely," he added. "I have told you that."

But she did not appear to hear this. She was talking eagerly, all in a rush, as if she were making herself to exhibit herself, as if she were holding off reserve from her by sheer force.

"I am lonely," she said. "And I am tired of money and luxury. Mr. Govan is right. And you are right——"

But she got no farther, for he caught her wrists and drew her triumphantly towards him.

"You will marry me?" he demanded.

"Yes," she replied, with an excited tremor in her voice.

He released her wrists for a moment, and drew himself up, and raised his eyes to the amazing heavens in a passion of exultation.

"I knew it!" he cried, more as if he were joyfully witnessing the discomfiture of his God than as if he were addressing his companion.

Then he remembered his duties, and took her by the wrists once more, though more gently this time.

"I was sure that you loved me!" he said. "I was certain of it, I say!" He remembered the catechism to which Mr. Govan had subjected him, and went on before she could speak : "Do you love the whole of me, all of me? My face? And my—my lips? Do you feel you could never love another? If you lived to be a hundred?"

"Do you love me like that?" she asked thoughtfully.

He nodded vehemently :

"Can you doubt it? More than that. I love you a hundred times more."

"And so do I," she said suddenly. "All that you said, you know. Just like that."

And at this he laughed gaily :

"I don't know your name, even."

"Beatrice."

"Beatrice," he repeated.

Then he became aware of a fresh privilege that was his, and he put his arms about her shoulders, stooped, and kissed her tolerantly, as he might have kissed a good child who had pleased him well.

She sprang away from him with a low exclamation.

"What is it?" he asked in a slightly bewildered voice.

"Something pricked me," she said, after a pause.

"Something pricked you? I don't understand . . ."

She laughed lightly, and came to him once again.

"A pin," she said. "And, my husband-to-be, don't try to understand. I am a woman, remember, and that is the explanation of anything I may ever do. Now, kiss me again, please."

He kissed her many times upon the lips, forcing himself to be passionate, and after a little she returned his kisses.

Never for a moment losing sight of the object he had in view, he whispered :

"We must be married very soon, Beatrice. I can't wait. You must marry me before we reach Wellington. We'll have a—a sailor's wedding, with the captain for a parson."

Greatly to his relief, she assented to this :

"Yes. I'm ready. Before we reach Wellington."

His senses were rapidly growing intoxicated—not with passion, but with jubilation as he thought that this richly dressed creature he was holding was his to use for his

comfort. Then she slipped suddenly from his arms and began to smooth her glossy hair.

"And now I must write my letters," she told him.

"You'll write letters to-night? After this?"

She laughed.

"I am a woman, remember. Quite mysterious. Don't try to understand."

And then she walked slowly away from him with that quiet gracefulness that was hers. He did not follow.

## V

Of course, if he had loved her he would have followed, but he was quite content to let her go, for he had got her promise to marry him—all that he wanted. He stood where he was, like a statue, gazing after her, but she never looked back. Then, when she was out of sight, he very slowly raised both arms high above his head, and drew a long breath of satisfaction; he was sensing his freedom. Then he became aware of a beating at his temples, and an intolerable feeling of oppression. He dropped his arms to his sides, exclaimed impatiently, and strolled aimlessly away.

He reached the smoke-room and paused irresolute outside of it. He could hardly contain his elation; he was longing to tell everyone that he was engaged to Beatrice Ward. Sounds of revelry still proceeded from the smoke-room. He found an open porthole that was well in the shadows and peered within.

The men were having a kind of impromptu concert. They sat about the little tables, very brightly and in schoolboy holiday attitudes. They all had glasses before them, and most of them were smoking cigars. Their white shirt-fronts and their shining, sweating faces both

glistened in the hard glare of the electric lamps. At one end of the smoke-room a few of the tables had been moved and a rough-and-ready stage created. And as Grant looked at this stage, over the heads of the roaring, laughing audience, through the blue haze of smoke, he saw that it was for the moment occupied by the purser (a fat Dublin Irishman named Walsh), who was singing and illustrating with a clever ludicrous parody of Mr. Govan's earnest manner :

“We're coming, we're coming with our little band,  
On the right side of temp-r-r-runce we'll all take  
our stand.

We don't chew tobacco because we think  
If a man chews tobacco he surely will drink.  
Down-with-King Al-cohol !”

“Idiots !” muttered Grant scornfully as he turned away.

Thrusting his hands in his pockets, hardly conscious of whither his steps were leading him, he wandered forward, for it was cooler there. He was brought back at last to the world only by colliding with the rail. But then his eyes opened wide with astonishment ; he was spell-bound. For the ship was entering Rio de Janeiro Bay, nearing the rocky sentinels which dominate the bay. . . .

The air was rich with the sweet scent of many flowers. Across that silver bay the city sparkled with a myriad welcoming lights. Far behind the city rose the Organ Mountains like great slaty clouds. The hot tropic night imposed upon land and sea alike a passionate, painful silence that was almost audible. . . .

## CHAPTER V

### GOD DISPOSES

#### I

A FEW nights later, Grant left the smoke-room, where he had been enjoying a (in so far as Mr. Govan was concerned) surreptitious cigarette and a liqueur, and strolled down the promenade deck. In this short time he had outwardly changed more definitely than another might have done in a year. He had completely recovered all his old assurance. He was quite as dogmatic and arrogant as he had been before ever Henderson had taken him in hand. He glanced covertly, patronisingly, too, at everyone he passed, fully conscious now that he could command as much money as they, if not immediately, at least whenever he was married. Anxiety had deserted him. Once again his face was careless and handsome.

Presently he passed Henderson, aggravating his insufferable air of swagger for the occasion. But Henderson took not the slightest notice of his existence, directing his whole attention to a cigarette he was burning, with a concern that was neither too casual nor too elaborate. Presently, again, two elderly handsome women smiled and nodded to him, with that unmistakable interest that a woman always shows towards a man who is engaged. And three men, all of them younger than he, glanced at him with envy. He perceived Beatrice Ward deep in a conversation with a moustachioed elderly colonel and his two daughters; but these politely moved away as he

approached, and at this trifling recognition of his claim upon Beatrice Ward he was more elated than ever. Everything was as it should be.

With a great show of attention, but with very little real concern, he spoke to her for a few seconds, and then led her to Mr. Govan, who was sitting in his chair. This was an almost nightly custom which had come into existence since the engagement had been announced. He would first enjoy a cigarette in private, and perhaps, as he had done to-night, a liqueur; he could not muster up the courage to tell Mr. Govan that he was smoking and drinking. Then he would seek Beatrice Ward, who would be expecting him. Then, after a few lover-like phrases, they would go to Mr. Govan, who regarded them both now as his own particular property, and spoke of them regularly as "his two happy young people." They would stay with Mr. Govan, never less than an hour, sometimes more than two hours. After that they would usually separate for the night.

On this particular evening the conversation lasted for the bare hour. It concerned itself chiefly with the blissful future of the lovers, and Grant took care that it should be a very general outline of that future, and Beatrice Ward seemed content enough that it should be so. Probably, thought Grant, she thought of nothing but the bare fact that he was going to marry her. . . .

At the end of the hour, Grant stood up and yawned superbly.

"Shall we——?" he suggested.

And at this the other two rose promptly.

"The nights are not so warm now," he supplemented.

And, indeed, it was true. Though far warmer than any English night, they were scarcely tropical now. The ship was getting too far south for that.

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise. Good-night—John and Beatrice. And may you both have pleasant dreams of one another."

This, of course, was from Mr. Govan, and immediately afterwards he placed a firm compelling hand upon Beatrice Ward's arm and steered her away. Grant did not at once move. Alert but very still, he contemplated for a little the shadowy deck and the dark sparkle of the water beyond the ship. A short time before it had all seemed so novel to him, yet now it was so familiar it was difficult to believe that he had not lived this life for years. After a minute or two he smiled, lit a cigarette, and strolled, with apparent carelessness, aft till he reached the spot where he had proposed to Beatrice Ward. But he did not linger there; he was not sentimental about this particular episode. With a quick, suspicious glance to either side of him, he descended into the steerage.

Keeping well in the shadows, he pulled the cap he was wearing farther over his eyes. He buttoned his coat, too, so as to cover the whiteness of his shirt. Then, after a few moment's indecision, moments during which it almost seemed as though he were tempted to go back, he whistled softly. The next minute a shadow flitted past him, and he turned eagerly to find a figure at his side.

It was a figure of a young girl, hatless, bewilderingly defenceless, something, as he afterwards remembered with a curious astonishment, quite outside of his previous conception of women. As far as he could be sure in the dim light, she had brown disordered hair, as though she had come to him straight from sleep. Her hair was up, but in rather an amateurish kind of way, as if she had not dealt with it as an adult for so very many weeks. Her eyes were downcast. But even while he was noticing this, she raised them somewhat doubtfully to his. There

was something behind them he had never seen before; he could find no words for them. Yet, as a matter of fact, they were hazel eyes, with just then a startled expression at the back of them.

"So you've come?" he said, speaking in a careless, gallant voice; and it took some considerable effort to accomplish this, for his voice had a most irritating tendency towards shakiness and excitement. "You've come?" he repeated.

She did not answer him, so he groped for her hand and pressed it.

"Please don't," she said, withdrawing it behind her at once like a schoolgirl.

Then, after a pause, she added :

"I should not have come. I did not remember that it would be so dark——"

"Don't you like the dark?" he put in.

"I don't know. It is not that. You will think dreadful things about me. In England a good girl does not meet a man like this. My father said so."

Grant laughed—a little uneasily, perhaps.

"Well, anyway," he began, "now you're here——"

But she shook her head quickly.

"But, of course, I can't stay! I—I should not dream of it! No; I only wanted to thank you for the plantains. And to tell you, too, that you should not have sent them to me."

He flung away his half-smoked cigarette with a gesture of vexation. This little action was significant of a great change in his opinions, for he had meant the interview to be of a kind wherein a cigarette would not be out of place.

"So you object to presents?" he said dryly.

And the next minute he wished that he had bitten his tongue before speaking like that.

"No," she replied emphatically. "I object to plantains. There were so many in my father's garden." She smiled quickly, then looked of a sudden very wise. "People only object to presents when they don't like them, of course," she concluded.

She was a mystery to Grant, and he racked his brains in vain for the key to that mystery. Was she childish merely? Or very, very deep? Her final remark seemed to suggest the latter, for the more he thought upon it, the more clearly did he perceive its depth—and its truth. Yet her murmured platitudes to the effect that "good girls do not meet men like this" was absurdly childish, simple—jarringly simple almost. Before he could arrive at any clear decision she spoke again:

"When you do not like a present you return it. That is the least you can do. But do you know the O'Connells?"

He shook his head, giving up all attempt to follow the workings of her mind.

"They have come from England like you," she went on. "I thought you would know them, perhaps. They have fourteen children. Isn't it funny—but very terrible? I gave your plantains to the O'Connells. They like plantains. It was wrong of me, perhaps?"

Grant felt unaccountably angry to hear her accusing herself, and he checked her at once with quite unnecessary violence.

"Certainly it wasn't wrong! Certainly not! I wish I had thought of it myself. I wish I had heard of them sooner."

"You're not angry, then?"

"Oh, no," said Grant loftily. "In fact, I'll send them some more plantains. That is, if there are any left. And if you really think——"

"You'll give them more? Really?"

"I shall be delighted," he assured her rather ponderously.

She smiled, and her whole face was lighted. He became of a sudden curiously disturbed, and he knew that but for the darkness she would have seen that his cheeks had begun to glow. A brilliant idea came to him from nowhere in particular, a scheme for seeing more of her.

"As a matter of fact," he said slowly, "I might do something for them. Something permanent, you know."

"If you would—" she began eagerly.

Then she seemed once more to recollect some private code of manners by which she was regulating her behaviour.

"That would be kind of you," she said soberly.

"I can, you know."

She nodded quickly, and he went on :

"I shall have a good deal of influence—and money—by the time we get to Wellington."

"That would be kind of you," she repeated.

"So I'm afraid you will have to see me again, you see. So that you may tell me what exactly the—the O'Connells want to do. That is," he concluded doubtfully, "if it isn't still against your principles . . . ?"

But he need have had no fears.

"Oh, but of course it isn't!" she exclaimed with assurance. "This will be for the sake of other people. It is quite different, that. My father always said so."

He nodded, vastly relieved.

"Of course it's different," he said. "I'm glad you're sensible and see that." He made his voice sound as business-like as he could manage to do. "Then, the day after to-morrow, shall we say? At the same time? I'm

sorry I can't meet you during the day, but my friends keep me so very busy——”

But once more he need not have feared.

“That will do very nicely,” she replied. She held out her hand with disconcerting abruptness. “Good-night, and thank you,” she said.

Almost mechanically he took her hand, and then, with a positive shock, he became aware how small and soft and warm it was; how pleasant it was to stand there holding her hand, while the dark, friendly night shut them off from the rest of the world.

“I wonder what your name is?” he said, half to himself.

“My name’s Ursola,” she replied, a little nervously. “Ursola Cleland.”

“Why,” he cried, “you’re Scotch! And I’m Scotch too! We are cousins, perhaps.”

She drew her hand away from him, glancing at him half-timidly, and hesitated.

“My father was Scotch,” she said at last. “But my mother was Peruvian—Spanish, you would say. She came as a child to Brazil.”

Again she smiled suddenly, and again he became aware of that curious interior disturbance. She became palpably embarrassed.

“I must go,” she murmured. “Good-night.”

## II

He had first met her upon the day following their departure from Rio. Uplifted by his engagement, and also by the loan of ten pounds which he had duly received from Mr. Govan, he had ventured into the smoke-room, whither he had not ventured since the early beginning of the voyage, and there, quite by chance, he had happened

to hear the purser discussing her with a couple of middle-aged cronies.

"If you want," had said the purser, "to see the queerest piece of goods that ever the two eyes of you have seen, go down into the steerage this minute. We shipped her last night at Rio. She's travelling steerage to Wellington. She's been designed by Almighty God for a state-room of her own and a French maid. She's never sailed in a ship before. And at breakfast-time this very morning, when they sounded the bell, she started for to say the *Angelus*, God bless her!"

Grant had only half attended to the purser's enthusiastic description, but afterwards some of the phrases applied to her had stuck in his memory. There is always a certain monotony about shipboard life unless it happens that you are a sailor. Quite suddenly, in the course of the long morning, it had occurred to him that it might be amusing, that at least it would be an interlude to that monotony, if he paid a visit to the steerage and caught a glimpse of the anomaly that, according to the purser's account, was there. Without any further deliberation he had gone to the steerage, which he had visited once or twice before with Mr. Govan upon missions of piety. And there he had come upon her, almost without searching for her, loitering about a crowd of children, and dressed in white muslin with a scarlet leather belt in which she had loosely tucked her handkerchief.

He had been quite sure it was she the moment he had set eyes upon her. To begin with, she made an interesting figure, and he was certain that he would have noticed her on one of his previous visits if she had come from England. And then the purser had been right; there was really something almost regal about her—not in her dress, which was very simple, but rather in her composure

and her sedate, dignified little way of behaving. And then her whole manner had a touch of something foreign in it. And finally she was so patently, so honestly bewildered at everything she saw.

So he had strolled towards her, curious merely, regarding her at this time quite impersonally, as he might have gone to regard some rare and curious exhibit which someone had advised him to see.

Then she had looked up suddenly, and their eyes had met, though he could not make out hers. She had not stared him through and then looked demurely away or at the ground, as a purely English girl would have done. On the contrary, she had looked at him very frankly, and, as he afterwards remembered, with a pleasurable interest almost. And then, quite unreasonably, her cheeks had slowly reddened, and she had left her companions and walked towards him. As she had passed she had glanced at him once again—timidly this time, yet with the same expression of interest. And then she had fallen behind him, and he had thought the incident was over. "A curious girl," he had summed her up.

But the incident had not ended thus. A sudden puff of wind had broken against his back, so that he involuntarily straightened his back to meet it, and clapped a hand to his head, though he was wearing only a cap. Something soft—soft, yet more material than the wind—had fluttered for a moment against his head and had then fallen at his feet, as the wind faded as quickly as it had come. Mechanically he had placed his foot upon the corner of this fluttering thing, had stooped to retrieve it, and had realised all at once that it was a small handkerchief, that almost certainly then it was her handkerchief.

It was. Turning immediately with the handkerchief

in his hand, he had found her regarding him with a curious mixture of embarrassment and dismay that was comical, that was altogether out of proportion to the situation. Quite pleasantly tickled by her confusion, he had advanced urbanely upon her, and had proffered her the handkerchief.

"Yours, isn't it?" he had murmured, with a smile that he meant to be sympathetic, yet discreet.

She had taken it from him quickly, had snatched it almost, yet the next instant she had become as formal as any great lady might have become.

"Thank you," she had said, with an air of dignity, as she tucked it back into her belt.

"A dangerous wind," he had remarked, half hoping to provoke her to further conversation, for her accent was soft, charged with a great peace.

But he had not succeeded. She had spoken not another word; she had never looked at him even. Nodding quickly, never looking back, she had walked smartly away. This time the episode was genuinely at an end.

So he had returned to the promenade deck, dismissing her entirely from his mind. But at intervals throughout the rest of the day he had found himself living through their short scene once again—putting phrases into her mouth, imagining how she would have acted under various different circumstances; the sort of thing that everyone does with the characters out of a book or a play, if these characters be well drawn. At Rio de Janeiro, of course, they had taken aboard a quantity of fresh fruit and vegetables, and that night at dinner there were many plantains, almost a surfeit of plantains. Grant by this time knew well enough that the fare of a steerage passenger is very different from that of a passenger in the first-class, so after dinner, swayed by one of

those unaccountable impulses that affect everybody now and then, he had tipped a steward handsomely (out of Mr. Govan's loan), and had arranged that a large bunch of plantains should be sent to that enigma, that baffling, provoking enigma in the steerage.

When you are in dire misery, if you happen to be desperately poor, for instance, these niceties of experiment are not apt to interest you. It is very often after a good dinner that the wildest schemes or practical jokes are mooted, since it is an amazing but profound truth that whenever a man is thoroughly satisfied he goes out looking for trouble. It must be remembered that Grant was in a high good humour with himself and with all the world, for he was still glowing with satisfaction at the thought of the engagement which he had pulled off so satisfactorily. Nor was there anything premeditated about his action; he did not send the plantains out of deliberate policy; he imagined at the time that he was performing a deed of philanthropy, and nothing beyond that. Yet at the very moment of arranging with the steward he had had a fresh idea, the mainsprings of which he had not stopped to discover. He had scribbled rapidly upon a leaf of his note-book: "I shall be at the foot of the ladder at 9.30 to-morrow night." And he had increased the steward's tip, and had given him the note to be delivered along with the plantains to "that poor child who joined us at Rio de Janeiro—you know who I mean; everyone is talking about her." The steward apparently knew.

True, when he came to consider his rash, impulsive act in the cold light of reason, he had had certain grave scruples. This was quite a different affair from his cold-blooded plot to ensnare Beatrice Ward. Then he had been too desperately self-centred to take into account any

moral considerations. Now, when he was courting fresh complications quite needlessly, his conscience became extraordinarily busy. But what of that? A wealthy man—at least, he was a potentially wealthy man—could surely take a charitable interest in a poor child who was so obviously out of her environment. Mr. Govan would have said that it was his duty to take such an interest. And if he did not mention his philanthropy either to the latter or to Miss Ward—well, motives are proverbially misconstrued, and Miss Ward was so patently in love with him that it was only natural she should be jealous. And supposing the assignation were a mistake—well, he had been thoughtless, then, that was all, and in any case he really intended it more as a joke than as a serious assignation. . . . With platitudes like these he completely silenced that doubtful conscience of his, and at the same time caused himself to think about the girl in the steerage far more than he was aware he was doing, far more than he should have done. . . .

He remembered all this as he went slowly to his cabin—the assignation over and a fresh one made—but now he remembered the details far more significantly. Again he told himself he would think no more of her (Ursola Cleland was a piquant combination, however); again he told himself that he was making much out of very little; and again he failed to persuade himself that such was indeed the case. He entered his cabin and pulled the door fast behind him, not mechanically, but with pathetic deliberation, as though he were trying to shut out something that made to disturb his peace. He stripped off his jacket with a great show of execution, and then he stood frowning for quite a long time; he was trying to find a name for the thing he had read in her eyes. He became aware of his occupation, exclaimed impatiently, and stooped

quickly to unlace his shoes. But even as he stooped a fresh thought struck him, and he straightened himself slowly, biting his lower lip and frowning once again. He had remembered how she had come to him seemingly straight from sleep, and he was trying to visualise her sleeping; her cheeks would be flushed, he thought, and the scent of her brown hair would gather above her like a halo. . . .

Suddenly he arrived abruptly at some definite conclusion, scrambled back into his jacket, switched off the light, and left his cabin. A cool breeze had freshened, and there was not a soul upon deck. Great scudding clouds flitted at irregular intervals before the face of the waning moon, and the broad sea was lightened and darkened alternately as though by the flashes of some dim, unobtrusive lamp. His footsteps led him—this is the phrase, for he appeared to go reluctantly—his footsteps led him to the steerage ladder, but no farther; he was quite content to stop there. A tall, brooding figure, he stood there passively, while a host of new disquieting emotions rioted through his heart. Half an hour passed like a minute—and only a week or two previously he had told himself that eighteen months were eighteen months! An hour passed, an hour and a half passed; he was not thinking, only his senses were at work. From one of the scudding clouds that was blacker than its neighbours rain began to fall with a soft patter upon the deck. He recovered consciousness with a start, shivered violently, and returned to his cabin in a most distracted condition.

The next morning he awoke feeling extremely irritated, with the emotional crisis of the previous night as remote as though it had belonged to a play he had witnessed then. His bones were rather stiff. He scrambled to the

floor with a jerk and bruised his foot upon a sock-suspender, which he must have cast recklessly upon the floor when he undressed. He thought of a bath, trembled at the thought, and began to dress in a hurry. He thought of breakfast, and the idea of food disgusted him. He thought of the social amenities of the day which lay before him, but he wished only for solitude. These symptoms were too typical, too unmistakable to be misunderstood. With a detachment as complete as if he had been considering the case of a total stranger, he realised that at last he knew what love was. . . .

### III

"Love has come to me unexpectedly—as it always does." That was a phrase he had thrown to Henderson, and it now maddeningly suggested itself, but he thrust it from him; he refused to admit how bitingly true it was. In or out of love he still had the future to consider. There must be no trifling with that, no flinching from the purpose he had set himself to perform. He told himself that he must be very cautious. By the time he had finished dressing he had managed to pull himself together. He considered he was able to deal capably with the situation.

He did not now try to persuade himself that he was not in love with Ursola Cleland. He felt somehow that the time for that was past. As yet he had no conception of the strength of the terrible emotion that had caught him in its grip. He felt only that it was a pity he had fallen in love. He supposed that love would continue to unsettle him for a while, that it would be a few weeks, maybe, before he would enjoy complete tranquillity once again. Nor did it even occur to him that it would be a

good thing never to see Ursola Cleland for the rest of the voyage. He thought that nothing could make his case worse than it now was, and that, therefore, he might as well see her. He did not foresee any complications that might arise.

#### IV

He determined to devote himself more assiduously than ever to Miss Ward, and as long as he was actually in her presence he did so. It was when he was left to himself that he suffered most. Had he been on land he might have escaped by train from the perilous neighbourhood which harboured Ursola Cleland, but on shipboard it was impossible to escape; he was as securely tied to her as material claims could have made him. Never before had the steerage attracted him so violently. He gravitated unfailingly towards it during every spare moment of his day. Sometimes he was full of an overpowering curiosity; he would wonder what had turned a girl like that into a steerage passenger. Sometimes he would grow hot with anger when he thought of how she must be suffering in her harsh environment. Sometimes he would feel quite unreasonably glad that she was in the steerage, since this fact gave him opportunities that he might not otherwise have had. But it was generally of her he thought. For the first time in his life he suffered because another was suffering. He forgot himself.

The day ended at last, but not his troubles, for he had a restless, feverish night. Morning found him with his eyes rather sunken, yet full of eagerness and expectation, since to-night he would see her again. All day he was animated; he almost succeeded in developing a faint sense of humour. He scarcely tasted dinner. He spent twice as much time as he was accustomed to do in the

smoke-room, and drank three liqueurs. He hurried through his nightly duties to Miss Ward and Mr. Govan in a perfunctory sort of way. And at last he was free of them, at last the night was his.

To-night he did not need to whistle. It is doubtful if he could have whistled, indeed, for it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege, like the prelude to some blatant rowdy flirtation with a woman of the streets. The sky was clear and the moon was already rising. He saw her before she saw him; she was already waiting with her back towards him. And something curious, something like a sob that made him gulp, rose in his throat at the sight of her. His whole being was suddenly vitalised, and the deck was like a soft carpet beneath his feet, a soft carpet covering a straight path which led only to her.

Somehow—he was quite unconscious of any act of volition—anyhow, he reached her, still unperceived.

“Good—good-evening,” he stammered at last, and he heard his voice as though it were the voice of a stranger, like a man speaking in public for the first time.

She did not start. She turned leisurely so as to face him—confidingly and welcomingly.

“I wondered if you would come,” she said simply.

“Didn’t you think I would come?”

“Yes. I thought you would come.”

He held out his hand, and after a moment’s hesitation she laid hers in it. They stood silently like this for a little, and at last he let it go reluctantly. His ready tongue was tied. His imagination had led him in anticipation only as far as the minute when he would once more hold her soft warm hand in his.

“Yes, I was bound to come,” he said at last. “I—I have thought quite a lot . . .”

“So have I,” she agreed, with the unstudied simplicity

of a child. Then, after a pause : "Would you mind if we walked ? I feel so cold here if I stand."

So, indifferent, utterly reckless as to whether he were seen or not, he fell into step beside her. Neither seemed to remember the prolific O'Connell family which was the ostensible excuse of their meeting.

She darted at him a quick, shy glance as they moved off, and perhaps she divined something of his state of confusion, for she seemed to have grown more composed than ever.

"It is—oh, so cold !" she repeated, with a little shiver. "Not like my father's garden."

This interested him at once, and he began to ply her with a great many questions. Had she never been in England ? What like was her father's garden ? Was she brought up by her father ? What friends had she ever had ? Was she travelling quite alone ?

And gradually, piece by piece, he made out something of her amazing story. Her father seemed to dislike England—"and Scotland too." He never wrote to Scotland, never received letters from Scotland. Yet on New Year's Eve he would sit by himself till the big American clock struck twelve. At this point Grant thought : "An outcast, who has done something, who has left his country in disgrace, never to return." And with his newly quickened imagination he pictured the outcast's vigil; he pictured her father, taciturn and terribly patient, seeing the New Year in with God alone knew what strange memories for his companions. . . .

Her mother had been beautiful and stately ; but she did not remember her very clearly, for she had died many years before—"when I was quite a child." And her mother had had no relations, for they had all been killed by a great earthquake. ("But it was the will of God,"

said Ursola, crossing herself and sighing quaintly.) And her father had only one relation that she knew about—a brother in New Zealand, in Wellington, to whom he wrote and from whom he received a letter every Christmas. And last year her father had died of a strange fever that the good Dr. João had been unable to name. So she had gone to Santos to live at the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, where Reverend Mother was so holy that some day it was said she would be canonised; where Sister Martina was so gentle and good to her, and so very wise; where old Sister Loyola was so fond of onions that it was said she abstained from them on Fridays as well as abstaining from flesh-meat. . . .

As Ursola talked, her reserve gradually broke down, and soon she was prattling as naturally as she might have done to her father or to the good Dr. João, or to the wise and gentle Sister Martina. Gradually, too, Grant was able to discover the sources of those qualities in her which had so baffled him. In herself she was as innocent and as unworldly as any postulant for the veil. Her streak of caution she owed to her Scottish ancestry and to her unbroken companionship with her father. Certain shrewd astonishing little bits of wisdom that she produced at intervals were echoed from Sister Martina. Her boldness was really ignorance. She trusted everyone because she believed in everyone.

She had stayed in the convent, it appeared, only until her passionate sorrow at her father's death had been assuaged. She had thought seriously of becoming a nun, but she had no vocation for that; she was much too wicked and silly. Something quite incomprehensible—but not something wrong, for Sister Martina had smiled and sighed when she told her of it—something here—she frankly touched her breast—had made her feel

as if something were awaiting her out in the world. She had written to her uncle in New Zealand, telling him that her father was dead and that she was coming to live with him. But the posts were proverbially slow; one must not wait too long for an answer. She had grown wearied of waiting. She had set out for New Zealand without instructions, very sure that her uncle would welcome her there, if only for her father's sake.

At this point Grant looked at her aghast.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, as her full meaning dawned upon him—"do you mean to say you are going to New Zealand without knowing you are expected? Suppose your uncle has changed his address in the meantime?"

She shrugged indifferently, as her Spanish mother must have done.

"Well, then," she said, "I shall ask for his new address. In Santos all the world knows all the world."

"But supposing he is dead?"

She smiled with superior confidence and shook her head:

"I do not think he is dead. And I know it will all be right. And I will tell you why. The night before I decided to go, while I slept, I saw a wonderful lady. She was like Sister Martina, yet—oh, so much more kind even! She told me it would be well with me in the end if I went. She must have been Our Most Blessed Lady. There! So now you see why I am quite certain that it will be right."

This was unanswerable, and besides Grant scarcely knew of what she was talking. His brain was in a whirl. She had plunged him into an unfamiliar world the language of which was incomprehensible to him.

"But you are travelling steerage!" he exclaimed, catch-

ing at something that his mind was able to grasp, something beyond which, he thought, there could be nothing more humiliating.

But again she only shrugged.

Yes; she was travelling steerage. She believed that was what they called it. Her father, unhappily, had left her so very little money. But in any case Sister Martina had always told her that it was sinful to spend needless money. The steerage was dirty, of course. And her bed was very hard. But the people all were kind to her. And what were her sufferings compared to those of the good St. Joseph when he fled into Egypt with Our Blessed Lord and His Mother?

Again this was unanswerable. . . .

Suddenly he became aware that she was telling him an amazing thing.

"Before you, I have never in my life before spoken with a young man," she said serenely and in a burst of confidence. "It was so strange at first."

He could scarcely believe his ears. He thought at first she must be using some exaggerated Latin metaphor. But incredible as it sounded, he at length discovered that it was the literal truth. Her father had owned a small estate in the country, and there had been no neighbours. And young men were not generally encouraged at the convent at Santos. And it had just happened that the booking-clerks and officials with whom she had had to deal had all been middle-aged or old. There was no doubt but that it was the truth.

And then he became aware that the moon was very bright by now. By an obvious association of ideas it at once occurred to him that they were conspicuous, and he grew nervous rather at the thought. He glanced guiltily about him. That mysterious sense of danger

was right. From the saloon deck above someone was watching them deliberately. With an increase of uneasiness, Grant began to wonder how long they had had this silent witness to their pacing.

His absorption was sapped. He grew inwardly restless. His mood, perhaps, communicated itself to his companion.

At any rate she, too, grew restless. She stopped in the middle of a long talk concerning her difficulties with her baggage. She lost the thread of her tale, became confused, blushed, then held out her hand.

"But it is later than I meant," she said. "Good-night. I must go."

He shook her hand somewhat furtively; then, as he let it drop, something seemed to strike her.

"The—the O'Connells," she murmured, but with a great show of self-possession.

Perhaps, however, she was not as self-possessed as she appeared to be. Perhaps she felt rather guilty for having forgotten this really important business. Perhaps she was wondering what Sister Martina would have said.

But Grant copied her apparent composure. He at once assumed a tremendously business-like air.

"Oh yes—the O'Connells," he agreed. "Well, what about them? Have you found out what they are wanting to do?"

She nodded importantly.

"Mr. O'Connell's heart is weak," she began, "so he wants some work that he will be well paid for, but where he will be required to work hardly at all. And his wife wants washing. And Aileen would wish to enter a convent. And Katie wants to act for the—the kinemato-graph. And Tim would like to be an engine-driver. And Larry would like to be a cowboy. And Patrick——"

She stopped before the dismay his face was exhibiting.

"But I have written them all down," she said precisely. "Here is the list."

She produced it, warm from its contact with her breast. He took it almost reverently and folded it very carefully. When he looked up again she was gone. She must have darted silently away from him at the moment he was folding the paper. He did not attempt to follow her. He climbed back to the saloon deck somewhat dispiritedly.

As he approached the watcher, who was smoking, something familiar in his attitude, something in the way he was holding his cigarette, made itself apparent. He realised that the watcher was Henderson. Henderson did not attempt to speak to him. Yet for the life of him Grant could not help raising his eyes as he passed. And the mocking expression he saw in Henderson's face stung him more bitterly than the most vitriolic taunts would have done.

## V

It would seem reasonable to suppose that Grant in the past had had enough practice at masking his feelings. Yet traces of the crisis through which he was passing must have shown themselves in his face, for a few days later Mr. Govan affectionately approached him, while he was leaning against the rail staring miserably at a grey sea. Mr. Govan spoke for a little about the weather, and Grant assented to his supposition that even a week in the tropics totally unfitted the traveller for a cold wind.

There was a lengthy pause after this, and then suddenly Mr. Govan laid a hand upon Grant's shoulder.

"John," he observed, "you're looking pale."

"Am I?" said Grant, rousing himself, fixing a smile upon his face. "Do you think I am looking pale? I don't think so, Mr. Govan. It must just be the change of weather, that will be it."

Mr. Govan shook his head and smiled comfortably.

"Well, now, John," he said in his mellow, intelligent voice, "I'm surprised you should think old Mr. Govan such a fool. Beatrice is looking pale, too. I may be two or three days' march nearer home than my two happy young people. But I haven't forgotten what young people have to go through at times."

Grant did not reply to this, so Mr. Govan removed his hand and went on still more confidently :

"It's the waiting for the wedding-night does it? Isn't that so? The lying awake at night thinking of Beatrice, and wishing she was beside you? Oh, you see I know! She told me how she loved you, John." Grant groaned at the news. "She told me only last evening. But I shouldn't tell you that. It makes the waiting worse?"

Grant managed to smile convincingly.

"Well, perhaps you shouldn't," he agreed. And then : "It does make it rather hard."

Mr. Govan smiled more comfortably than ever.

"Rest assured," he went on, "that I'd never do that. Trust Mr. Govan to watch over both of you, to see that nothing comes between you. Well, now, the waiting is nearly over. I see no reason why you young people shouldn't enjoy yourselves in lawful wedlock—as soon as we've rounded the Cape."

Grant was overcome by the news. But as Mr. Govan had expected him to be overcome (though for other reasons than the true ones), no harm was done. Mr. Govan—big, impassive, and assured—stood for a minute while he contemplated Grant with relish and approval.

Then he patted Grant upon the shoulder, turned, and marched deliberately away.

"I wish he wouldn't interfere," muttered Grant below his breath.

And then for one surprising minute a great wave of hatred rose up in his heart against Mr. Govan. The next minute, of course, it was gone, and Grant could scarcely believe that he had ever experienced it. Mr. Govan's concern was natural enough, he supposed. Under the circumstances Mr. Govan could hardly be expected to understand.

All the same, Mr. Govan's words stimulated Grant's reason afresh, and for many days afterwards he was intensely rational and practical. He devoted himself carefully to Miss Ward, and told himself that once they were married things would turn out satisfactorily. He never went near the steerage, never saw Ursola. And though he suffered, he did not suffer anything like as severely as he had expected to do. He took credit to himself for this, and thought that he was steadily breaking himself of a foolish and a dangerous infatuation. He did not realise that only the cold weather was responsible for his lack of fire, that with his return to the tropics his misery would return too—and this time with tenfold violence.

Yet such was the case. They rounded Cape Horn in foul, sleet ing weather, not a gale, but a steady driving wind. That famous cape was a great disappointment to Grant. He had expected something impressive, something outstanding and majestic, like the Great Orme's Head beside Llandudno, for example. But all he saw was a rocky, inhospitable coast, partially wreathed in fog and with no sign of a cape about it. He was so disappointed that he scarcely gave it a glance. And after

that the weather steadily improved, the air grew warmer once again. At once he became obsessed with the desire to speak with Ursola, and actually started out to find her, and mastered his inclination only by a most exhausting effort. But that sort of thing could not go on. The following evening at dinner his temptation was renewed, and this time he yielded to it almost without a fight. He would go to her that night, he would speak with her if only for a moment. Nothing should stand in his way.

Once he had made up his mind to this, he became as careless of consequences as a man who was spending his last coin in the sure knowledge that he was to die immediately. He abandoned all thought of the morrow, deliberately gave himself up to the luxury of the moment, and formulated a hundred questions that he wanted to ask her, a hundred answers that he would give should she question him. He was amazed because he had been so slow, disgusted with himself for wasting his opportunities as he had done. He wondered if she had missed him, if she had been hurt with him for never coming to her again. He wondered, too, how he might best excuse himself. . . .

He became incredibly excited. And in the very thick of his excitement Mr. Govan came to him with the request that Miss Ward and he would join him on deck at once if possible. Mr. Govan was radiating confidence and proprietorship. It appeared that he considered the time had at last come when a definite day could be fixed for the wedding. Grant hesitated scarcely at all. He thought of Miss Ward's sad, well-bred reserve, of her pale face with its dark eyes, which had grown melancholy of late, doubtless (as he thought uncomfortably) because he had not played the lover to her with sufficient vehemence. Miss Ward, when compared with Ursola, seemed posi-

tively old. And in any case he could not talk coherently to her that evening—no, he could not do it.

"Not this evening, Mr. Govan, I think," he said. "The fact is, I—I can't join you as usual this evening. The wedding-day—fix it whenever you think best."

But Mr. Govan pressed him.

"But I can't fix it," he protested. "Beatrice must do that, John." A slow smile expanded over his face, and he went on with some excitement: "But didn't you know that? Well, now, what a lot about matrimony you will have to learn, my boy!" His breathing grew thick and his voice sank to a whisper: "Didn't you know that?" he repeated in the same excited voice.

But Grant stopped him with a gesture, smiling at the same time, so as not to offend him:

"I'm afraid I can't come. I—the fact is, I have a headache."

"Just you and I and Beatrice?"

But Grant was firm.

"I can't," he repeated. "I'm sorry. Any other time. To-morrow, if you like."

Before such decision even Mr. Govan's persistence was baffled. He went off reluctantly, looking slightly injured.

## VI

But this could not go on.

He did not see Ursula that night, though he loitered for more than an hour in the hope that eventually she would appear. He awoke next morning with chattering teeth and a prickling skin, but he got somehow to the floor, picked up a towel, dropped it, then went back to bed in a panic. He pressed the bell for a steward, and, when the latter came, gave him certain instructions.

"I'm very ill," he said. "Please tell that to Miss Ward and—Mr. Govan. And lock my door, will you? Don't let anyone come near me. I'm too unwell to see anyone—do you understand? Tell Mr. Govan that too."

The steward said that he did understand, and then left him. For a few minutes Grant experienced a certain relief that he had escaped the immediate ordeal of facing the world of the ship. But his relief was short-lived. Very soon the same tormenting thoughts that he had endured the previous day began afresh, and their power was not a whit diminished. He tried to picture a life without Ursola, but such a life seemed impossible. He remembered that only as recently as the previous day he had (passively, if not actively) acquiesced in the supposition that he was going to marry Miss Ward, and now he was amazed at his own blindness in supposing that could ever be. He recoiled from worldliness as in former times he had recoiled from the prospect of hardship. Every fibre of him cried for love—love as it was personified by Ursola.

His egoism failed him utterly. Hitherto he had been so very sure of himself, so confident, but now he was like a child groping in the dark. He longed miserably for guidance; he longed passionately for someone to help him, someone to whom he might confide all his difficulties, and who would give him advice. In this extremity he thought of Mr. Govan. Up till now he had depended absolutely upon Mr. Govan for consolation and comprehension. But the idea of going to Mr. Govan with such a story as was his seemed almost ridiculous. He perceived what a hollow pretence his admiration for Mr. Govan had been—what a self-begotten, hollow pretence.

Thus, when a persuasive, insistent tapping sounded presently at the door, he lay very still, crouching uncon-

sciously like a desperate persecuted animal. Presently he heard Mr. Govan's voice, somewhat muffled, through the panels :

"It's Mr. Govan only. John! It's just Mr. Govan bringing Beatrice's love and sympathy—and his own."

He did not answer.

"Are you sleeping, John?" the voice went on.

Still he did not answer. And presently he had the satisfaction of hearing Mr. Govan's receding footsteps. And he heaved a deep sigh of exhausted thankfulness. That danger was past for the moment, and he had not quite realised how fearfully he had dreaded it.

But more than ever he felt the imperative need of a counsellor. And of all unlikely counsellors his thoughts turned towards Henderson. He did not know why. Again he was amazed at himself. Henderson had treated him with a great deal of brutal frankness, and for some time past with contemptuous indifference. Henderson had never troubled to conceal the low opinion he held of him. Yet he knew that he wanted Henderson. Henderson's cold cynicism might almost be refreshing, he thought. Henderson was a man of the world in every sense, and it was certain that not a syllable of cant would be allowed to pass his lips. And Henderson was a doctor. There is a vague yearning for professionalism that comes to every man when he is brought down low, let him pretend to the contrary as stubbornly as he chooses. Grant made a resolution, and before it had time to cool he rang the bell.

"Ask Dr. Henderson if he will come as soon as possible," he told the resulting steward. "Tell him that I am ill, dangerously ill."

The last was an afterthought, for Grant did not think that he was really dangerously ill. But he remembered

suddenly how forcibly Henderson had cast him off. He feared that no ordinary message would succeed in procuring him an interview. But he was fairly confident that an appeal to Henderson's professionalism would meet with a response. Actually he was beginning to learn something of human nature, though, indeed, he had still much to learn.

He was right. Within an hour of his message Henderson appeared, ushered in by the steward. Henderson waited till the latter had withdrawn and had closed the door. Then he collectedly drew up a chair to the head of Grant's bed and sat down.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I urgently wanted to consult you," said Grant, with a pitiful attempt at his old important manner.

Henderson nodded.

"So I understood," he said. "But you mustn't do that, you know. I was going to send a message, but I thought I might as well tell you in person. When you are feeling ill on board a ship you must send for the ship's doctor. I could not undertake your case. It would be highly unprofessional."

Fearful of losing him, Grant dropped all his reserve.

"But it was only an excuse for bringing you," he explained eagerly. "I'm not physically unwell."

"Indeed?" said Henderson coldly. "Is that your opinion? Well, let me tell you you were never more mistaken. Your temperature's abnormal, for one thing. You're almost in a high fever. I should advise you not to expose yourself like that. I haven't examined you, of course, but I should imagine you are in for a bad chill."

Grant was usually morbidly solicitous about his health, so it is very significant of his condition that he paid scarcely any attention to Henderson's announcement.

"Am I?" was all he said. "Well, that can be seen to afterwards. But I—I want your advice, Dr. Henderson. I am sorry I spoke to you like I did. But I must have your advice! See," he went on excitedly. "You once said you were partly responsible for me, because you had brought me here. Well, I—I remind you of that. Can't you see that it's terribly urgent?"

Henderson studied him critically for a moment.

"Very well," he said at last, making up his mind. "I'll hear what you have to say. Afterwards I shall send you Dr. Rimmer. Go on."

He waited for a little. Then, as Grant was silent:

"Well?" he said brusquely. "Speak up, Grant! I fail entirely to see anything that remains to be said between us. But if you've anything to say, say it. You mustn't waste my time, you know."

Grant's lips worked nervously, and the expression in his eyes was almost piteous. At last he began in a queer artificial voice:

"There are seasons, as you may readily imagine, when temptation rises up——"

But for the time being it was his last feeble effort at salving his pride. His nerves gave way suddenly. Panic swept him like a cyclone, and he poured out his tale in a torrent that was partly incoherent. He told of his fear of ridicule, of that dogged perversity that had prompted him to bargain with Henderson. He confessed to his subsequent panic. He admitted the foreboding and the great fear which had racked him ere the voyage was a week old. He told of his struggle with pride, of his obstinate resolve never to admit he was in the wrong, of his motives for wooing Miss Ward, of his disappointment when Henderson saw through these motives, of his anger. And then he described Ursola.

He confessed to their meetings, to the crisis he had undergone, to his love.

"If only I had told you sooner!" he deplored. "If only she had refused me—Beatrice Ward, I mean!"

And so once more he was reminded of his predicament:

"But of course she would never do that. She loves me; she's madly in love with me."

He enlarged on his monstrous despair. He enlarged on his torment. He repeated himself. Half fearing he would be misunderstood, half wishing to excuse himself, he spoke of a score of details that were useless. Henderson cut him short:

"That's enough, I think. I quite understand."

Obediently Grant stopped. Already relief had come to him—not happiness, but relief that was likely to be permanent. He was more self-assertive again; that, too, was an odd consequence of his confession. Quite illogically, he felt he had made reparation. He had sinned, but others had sinned before him. He had sinned splendidly, perhaps. . . .

From this new rôle of a sombre, splendid iconoclast he was aroused by Henderson:

"And Ursola Cleland?"

"Surely she knows what I'm suffering. She's—a woman."

"She's sixteen or seventeen," said Henderson indignantly, "if that's what you mean. I've seen her, you know. She's no more than sixteen or seventeen."

And before Henderson's scorn Grant's self-assertion faded.

"I didn't mean that," said Henderson. "But you say that she's fond of you? You're perfectly sure?"

"Yes," said Grant firmly, "I am perfectly sure."

"But you would be," said Henderson thoughtfully. "You're always perfectly sure." And then: "I wonder what women see in you, Grant. . . . Never be sure about women."

Grant was silent at this, so presently Henderson went on:

"And you said that you loved her—decently loved her, I mean?"

And at this Grant was moved to a new flood of oratory. Regardless of Henderson's advice, he sat up in bed. Words came rapidly, diffident words almost, very apt and suggestive. A poet might have envied him.

He spoke slowly and distinctly.

"She's a part of myself," he declared. "I see her in front of me, fitting me, like a groove. My breast is a hollow, so that hers may fill it. I stretch out my arms, that my arms may encircle her. We are two and yet one, like a torn piece of paper—two ragged pieces, yet one smooth sheet when the pieces fitted together. I am half complete without her. And—it's breaking my heart."

He slowly lay down like a man sinking back from a vision.

"Yes," said Henderson, nodding. "You love her right enough."

"Oh, I love her," Grant peevishly assented.

He had become his natural self again. But Henderson scarcely heeded him.

"You love her," he repeated. "You! A man like you! You love her. It's the most interesting thing I've ever come across, I think. It can't be explained, either. Properly speaking, it's quite unscientific. It distinctly postulates the supernatural. But then, of course, the real

question, the vital question, is : Is the supernatural truly unscientific ? Are science and religion really as much opposed as Feuerbach, for example, imagined ? Is it not possible——”

But Grant, for whom these general speculations possessed not a shred of interest, interrupted somewhat impatiently.

“ But what am I to do ? ” he cried.

“ Eh ? ” said Henderson, breaking off. “ Do ? Why, do what men in your condition have done since the beginning of man. Marry her, of course.”

“ But how am I to marry her ? You know—my circumstances. You can guess . . . ”

Henderson rose deliberately, and looked down upon Grant with a kindlier expression than his face was accustomed to wear.

“ See here, Grant,” he said, “ perhaps I’m to blame in a way. Perhaps I forgot you were human. I’m afraid I regarded you only as a very interesting case. I experimented upon you. It was a kind of immoral vivisection.”

Grant was silent, so Henderson went on :

“ I shall remain some time in Wellington. And there are other things you might do besides working on a farm. I’ll find you a decent job of some kind—something you are really fit for, you know. After all, I shall see your development as a husband, and I shouldn’t wonder but that that will be as interesting an experiment as the one I originally meant.”

“ You’ll find me a job ? ” said Grant eagerly. “ You’ll help me ? With money, I mean ? ”

Henderson nodded.

“ Yes,” said Grant, relapsing once more into hopelessness, “ but how can I marry her ? You forget Beatrice

Ward. I'm engaged to her, and she thinks that I love her. I've said that I do love her. And I've told Mr. Govan that."

Henderson shrugged with a touch of impatience.

"There's only one thing to be done there," he declared. "I should imagine it's pretty obvious, too. You must end your engagement immediately. Don't you see that for yourself?"

"How?" asked Grant sullenly.

"By making a clean breast of it." Then, as Grant was silent, he went on: "If she loves you as much as you say, it's hard on Miss Ward. But it will be worse for her still if you marry her. A hero might carry it off—not you. No, Grant, that was a bad, discreditable business, and it's got to be stopped. Tell her to-morrow."

Grant started up in a paroxysm of fear.

"But I can't do that!" he cried in dismay. "I can't, I can't! Don't you see what would happen? She loves me to distraction, I tell you! She would tear me to pieces. She would be mad with jealousy and—and disappointment. I'd be publicly shamed, a laughing-stock. . . ."

"Well," said Henderson calmly, "what about it?"

Grant shivered, and lay down again.

"I can't do it, Dr. Henderson," he said doggedly. "I'm sorry. . . . No, I can't do it."

"Then, what will you do?"

Henderson waited a minute. Then:

"What can you do?" he pressed.

Grant urged him desperately:

"I don't know. Indeed, I don't know. That's what's killing me, killing me, I say! Can't you suggest something? Can't you think of a way——"

"Yes," interrupted Henderson coldly. "I can. I

thought you had learnt your lesson. But I see you're as bad as ever. There's just one thing that could save you from perdition, Grant—just one thing. If only you could come through a door suddenly—and meet yourself . . . ”

Grant tossed impatiently.

“Talk,” he complained. “Nothing but fine words. I don't want talk, Dr. Henderson. I want something practical. Can't you think of a practical way? Think of something that could happen to me that would prevent me marrying Beatrice. And then we could tell her it had really happened. Tell her fairly vaguely, you know.”

“You forget Mr. Govan,” said Henderson. “From what I have seen and heard of that gentleman he is uncommonly definite. Vagueness wouldn't do for him, I should imagine. He would want to know everything, every detail.”

Grant groaned at the thought of this fresh complication.

“Besides,” concluded Henderson coldly, “it wouldn't be honest.”

He waited for the significance of this to sink in. It must have done so, for presently Grant moved uncomfortably and looked rather shamefaced.

“I shall leave you now,” said Henderson. “And I shall send Dr. Rimmer at once. Think carefully about what I have said. A frank admission and an apology to Miss Ward are your only hopes.”

“There must be some other way,” muttered Grant rebelliously—“some middle course.”

Henderson, his hand already on the door, shrugged his indifference.

“I fail to perceive it,” he said.

## VII

As far as that went, Grant, too, failed to perceive it. The longer he thought, the more clearly did he perceive that the cup that he was to drink was a bitter one. A way of escape presented itself, but the taking of that way involved the acceptance of a terrible humiliation. It was hard to satisfy justice. It seemed that justice was inexorable.

The chill he had caught was a severe one, and confined him to his cabin for a couple of days. But mercifully for him it remained a chill—mercifully, since Dr. Rimmer, the ship's doctor, was old and somewhat incapable. The fact was, he was travelling for his health, and received his passage, board, and accommodation upon the *Wanaka* in return for his professional services. He was thoroughly reliable only in cases of sea-sickness and indigestion. A severe chill like Grant's taxed his abilities to their utmost.

Once the nature of his malady had been spread abroad, Grant, of course, could no longer seclude himself from visitors. He had to suffer the presence of Mr. Govan. Mr. Govan paid a first visit of exactly two hours. And upon the following day he brought Miss Ward, carefully and conspicuously chaperoning her, as though Grant were a maniac liable to spring upon her without a minute's warning. And at the sight of her pale cheeks and burning eyes Grant's misery was intensified. He knew that anxiety for himself had put her in such a condition. And so curiously is the average being made up that it is almost always hateful to be sympathised for by someone who is antipathetic. . . .

The next morning, however, Grant woke up with a start to the refreshing knowledge that he was rested somewhat, that at least he was able to take up the burden of life

once again. Almost immediately he became aware that there was something unusual in his environment. He was at once conscious of little waves lazily lapping the hull of the ship. That was strange. For weeks he had not observed the sound of the sea with that particular unfamiliarity. At once his mind was carried back to a little East-Coast town in England, a town wherein he had lodged in his lecturing days, by the edge of the harbour.

He knew quite well what had reminded him of that town. There he had been awakened on a calm lazy morning by wavelets breaking upon the quay with a sound identical to the present ones. Then it would almost follow that from then until now he had never heard such a sound, that the sound was remarkable amongst the usual noises of the ship. . . . Suddenly he realised that the engines had ceased to throb, and that the unnerving silence was crying for the throb of the engines to break it. For one brief second the wild thought flashed through his mind that he had been delirious—unconscious for days, perhaps; that the voyage was at an end. But he knew that that could not be so. So he rose in trembling haste, the last traces of his weakness pushed into oblivion by this new problem which confronted him. He dressed quickly. He went on deck, fearful of what he would find there.

But on deck everything was as usual. Some busy barefooted sailors were swabbing it quite unconcernedly; the hour was early yet. A light mist was rolling back from the ship before a blazing sun whose heat was already perceptible. The ship was the centre of an immense circle of blue water the circumference of which was the horizon. There was something fantastic, something funny, in the ship's total inactivity in the midst of that desert of water.

It was disgracefully shocking almost, like the spectacle of a sober, grey-headed milliner's forewoman keeping a Bank Holiday rather riotously. You felt you wanted to reprove the ship indignantly, beginning your reproof with some such phrase as : "At your time of life and with all your experience, to go on strike !" She seemed absolutely inert to Grant. As a matter of fact, she was drifting northward at an incredible rate of progress in the grip of one of those currents that run in the Pacific. But only a sailor would have suspected that.

Grant was no sailor. And the leisurely, confident manner of everyone and the tranquil weather greatly reassured him. Upon making inquiries, he learnt that there had been a slight mishap in the engine-room ; that they might be delayed for a day or two, but that there was nothing whatever to fear. Breakfast was tremendously gay, for the novelty of the situation had animated and aroused everybody. Certain hilarious passengers concocted fishing-parties even ; they planned to secure the ship's boats for a morning's fishing on the lake-like sea. But the captain would not hear of that. So they voted the captain unsporting, and fell back upon their deck-games with a renewed zest, and upon laughing, frivolous speculations as to their condition of shipwrecked mariners.

In the irritating days which followed a great reaction set in. The ship's idleness communicated itself to her passengers. They could settle to nothing ; they grew quarrelsome and unreasonable. Their one pastime, of which they never seemed to tire, consisted in speculations about the nature of the accident. For no authoritative pronouncement concerning that had been made. The ship's officers were full of much technical information which sounded fully satisfactory at the moment, but

which left the hearer as ignorant as it had found him. And as a consequence of this, of course, a score of violently conflicting theories arose, splitting the passengers into as many cliques. It was a point of honour with everyone to uphold the absolute veracity of his particular theory. Personal quarrels were picked. All were agreed upon one thing only—that the captain was waiting to signal a passing ship, and that a ship would be passing soon, for they lay in the track of ships. They did not allow for the current.

It was curious, too, how sarcastic they grew at the expense of the ship. Up to the time of the accident they had all been as hotly jealous of her reputation as a young lover of his mistress's. They had spoken of her always with pride as “a good honest old sea-boat—worth twenty of your new-fangled flyers.” But now she had played them this trick, and no term of abuse was vile enough to heap upon her. She was old and incapable. Her engines were worn out. She was obsolete. A simple fiery old colonel—Heaven knows why he expected to be believed—insisted that he knew for a fact that the Board of Trade had condemned her. Her owners were misers. Her captain and crew were incompetent. . . . After a great deal of this, petitions began to pass from hand to hand.

Grant was the only member of that shipboard company who secretly rejoiced in the accident. He rejoiced in it greatly, since it necessarily postponed his marriage with Miss Ward. Even had he loved her, it would have been impossible to think of marriage while the ship drifted helplessly at the mercy of the fickle sea. Marriage would have seemed an outrage—like flaunting gaiety in the face of a starving beggar. Even Mr. Govan dared not propose it. But, indeed, Mr. Govan had other things to think about. He was revelling in exhortation, beating

round the ship like a prophet calling men to repentance. He held continual prayer-meetings, became shameless in his zeal, was liable to burst forth into earnest oratory at all times and places. He forgot the trick of ordinary intercourse, turned his life into a succession of speeches, and urged as his excuse the imminence of dire disaster. ("We're all Christian people, I hope. This accident may be the beginning of the end for us. It behoves us to take much thought.") Perhaps, after all, Grant was not the only person who rejoiced at what had happened.

Grant just then was going through a bad time. He was no nearer a decision than he had been when Henderson had talked to him. He avoided Mr. Govan as far as he decently could. After the first day he was spared much of Miss Ward, for his chill had infected her, and she kept her cabin for a time, and then emerged, paler than ever, only for her meals. Sometimes, late in the evenings mostly, he almost believed that at last he had decided to be frank, to tell her the truth. But he always procrastinated in the morning; the truth was not in him; he shrank as instinctively from humiliation as a cat would shrink from a bath. It might have been different if he could have seen Ursola. But try as he would, Ursola had become invisible. And he could not force his way to her and drag her aside for a private conversation. And though he sent a steward—the same steward who had carried his first message—with a note, the steward came back to him without a reply. He feared the tongues of the ship if he did any more. Of necessity, he was left by himself to decide.

It was perfectly natural that he should grow morbid. His whole mind was distraught, and dark fancies began to play within it. He became terribly nervous, frightened at shadows almost. He became inconceivably irritable.

His days were a series of weak, futile rages. Concerning himself, he aggravated his preposterous anxiety. He grew obsessed with the delusion that something would happen to him as a punishment. As a consequence of this he developed a habit of stealthy self-examination. He would work his joints tirelessly—till they were sore, till he thought them affected by disease. He would stare at himself in a mirror, for traces of fever in his complexion. He would gaze so long at his tongue that his throat would grow sore, and he would fancy he was catching diphtheria. . . .

A small swelling developed at the nape of his neck, and at once he believed it was cancer. . . .

It is easy to smile at his forebodings, yet no one will smile who has been through them, and that sort of thing is astonishingly common, especially common among men. Delusions like Grant's are terribly real while they last—more real than reality, it might be said. He suffered so genuinely that everything else was forgotten. And after a spell of stunned anguish he fled to Henderson for confirmation of his fears.

Henderson had not the heart to turn him away, when he saw the misery that was written in his face. He listened to his stammered explanation, nodded comprehendingly, then pointed him to a chair.

"Take off your collar," he said, after Grant had sat down.

So Grant took off his collar. He sat there trembling, with bared neck, as though he were a criminal about to be garroted. He was acutely conscious of Henderson's trained, sensitive fingers delicately manipulating about the region of his neck. He waited breathlessly. He had keyed up his nerves for the shock of confirmation till he thought their vibration must be audible. And then quite

abruptly Henderson ceased his examination, and went to wash his hands.

"There's nothing whatever wrong with you, you know," he said over his shoulder.

Grant jumped to his feet as if he had been electrified.

"It isn't cancer?" he cried incredulously.

And Henderson shook his head.

"Not a trace of it. It's a slight inflammation of the glands—the effect of your chill, I should imagine."

Grant started to put on his collar methodically. But the action was quite mechanical. His face was the colour of lime—sweat had broken out upon it in tiny glittering drops—and his knees were trembling. His relief was not a pretty sight; it looked as though he were going to collapse. Perhaps Henderson noticed this, for he threw down the towel with which he had been drying his fingers and went abruptly to the door.

"Well," he said, opening it, "there's no more to be said, is there? You think too much about yourself, Grant. If you thought more of others. . . . A doctor has to learn that lesson, you know."

The air which came in revived Grant somewhat. He drew it into his lungs in great gulps, sighed his satisfaction, and made as if to speak. But he could not speak. He felt terribly mortified because of the weakness he had exhibited. He murmured some platitude or other to the effect that "it was always as well to make certain." Then :

"Thank you," he got out rather ungraciously.

And without another word he left Henderson, and he never spoke with him again.

This was in the late afternoon. As he stepped on deck the sun was already sinking far to the west. The great calm which had fallen was still as unbroken as ever, and

the sea was like a stagnant lake, full of queer lanes and patches, as though oil had been poured upon it. That same simple old colonel who claimed to be in the secrets of the Board of Trade was pacing the deck with an elderly lady whom he was obviously striving to convert. "Board of Trade. . . . Scandalous. . . . Propeller at the bottom of the sea"—such were the fragments from his lips that floated to Grant through the heavy air. But Grant scarcely heeded him, for he had been reprieved; he was free to enjoy the world once more. Incidentally he was free to take up the burden of his troubles, and it seemed that these awaited him at the door, heavier than ever, now his great absorbing fear of cancer had been dispelled. He would probably have yielded to circumstances which, after all, were unconquerable. His terror had broken him almost; the entire situation was too much for him. Another normal day might have brought him despairing to confess to Miss Ward and Mr. Govan. But the normal became at a discount on that little floating world—as it often does in the greater world, to the unfailing amazement of those who take a few similar years as a pledge for all eternity. . . .

Dawn seemed slow of coming the next day, the fifth day since the accident. The calm still held, there was not a cloud in the sky, yet the darkness lingered in the east like a mist, as though night had rebelled against the constant usurpation of day. The air was fiery and impure, and it seemed to scorch the lungs. It is true that the current was bearing the ship nearer and nearer to the Tropic of Capricorn. But that could not account for it. This terrible heat had fallen upon them suddenly—more like a plague.

Before the sinister mysterious danger which seemed to lurk somewhere behind that outward peacefulness,

private quarrels were forgotten. The passengers roamed the ship uneasily, or gathered in little groups, pathetically indifferent now to the causes of the accident, concerned only with its possible effects upon themselves. Besides, the real nature of the accident had seemingly at last leaked out. Who can say, after all, how these things get about? At any rate, that persistent colonel had struck upon a truth for once; it was whispered everywhere that the propeller shaft had broken, and that the propeller was at the bottom of the sea. Yet in the course of the day the tension was somewhat relieved. A light south-easterly breeze sprang up. It cooled the atmosphere, and at the same time the fear which was gripping the ship. A sail of a kind was rigged, and though this somehow appeared to set the seal of truth upon the news of the lost propeller, the passengers did not care. The ship looked like a joke, like a motor-car to which a donkey had been harnessed. But anything was better than stagnation. Dinner was quite animated.

But the officers were not animated, for they knew that the glass was falling. It was falling quickly, till it seemed that the pressure of the atmosphere must break it. The sun had not set. Incredible as this may sound, it was none the less a fact. It had been snuffed out suddenly like a candle by a great mass of apparently solid darkness which had risen to meet it in the west. The change from light to darkness had been instantaneous. And now, night though it was, the officers could sense the brooding presence of that evil mass of darkness which was darker than the night itself, as a dog senses the presence of an evil spirit.

Grant happened to overhear the second officer discussing the situation with the purser.

"I don't like the wind," said the former. "It's blow-

ing us straight to that nightmare. Suppose a cyclone catches us? Suppose we're blown nor'-east by a cyclone? We'll hit the Austral Islands. Or if we miss them, there's the Cooks and all the Society group. Or if we pass between 'em, there's Suwarrow and Manihiki and Penrhyn. It's like running about in Trafalgar Square with your eyes shut."

Soon after that the miserable sail was lowered. It made little difference, for the wind, aided by the current, still bore them towards whatever lay ahead. And now a real panic was imminent among the passengers. There was no doubt of their danger. Before the soundlessness of the dark night, before the anxious faces of the officers, and that maddening, irritating wind, too strong to be disregarded, too feeble to be of use, even the boldest of them was at least disquieted. Midnight came, but no one had gone to bed.

Quite unobtrusively the sailors flitted about the deck, making fast what they could, since a storm of some sort seemed inevitable. At last the stillness had been broken by a steadily increasing roaring in the south-west, which the optimistic tried to think meant land and safety. The sea, too, was no longer untroubled. It rose and fell sluggishly and uneasily, and with it the helpless ship rose and fell on the crest and trough of the sea. The tension of the moment grew horrible. Everyone waited breathlessly expectant of he knew not what, gazing ahead into the darkness which was now intensified by the white, indifferent deck-lamps which lighted the sailors at their task. Men scarcely knew their friends. Most people learn as a habit to wear a mask in public. And from every face the mask had dropped.

And then, with terrible suddenness, the head of the ship spun round till it pointed due north-east. It was

as if she had won back her steerage-way, and had a mad invisible steersman wickedly changing her course. The roar grew deafening, and increased to such a fine pitch that it became a torture—like cold water dropped continuously upon one spot of the head. Something, it must have been rain, swept the ship like a deluge and was gone. She plunged, luckily at an angle, into a crazy universe of crashing, struggling winds which shrieked at her and tore at her. The sea was smooth again, but terrifyingly smooth now, for you could see that but for the gale there would have been valleys and mountains of water. But the gale, like a keen-edged sickle, cut off at the base every wave which rose to resist it. It drove the ship before it at its own rate. It cleared the ship of every detachable article, including three of her crew. A great mass of water, like a wall of black marble, struck the ship, swept her, then passed on. Every light went out. Half a dozen women began to scream. They were fairly close to Grant, yet he knew they were screaming only by the babbling motion of their lips.

"What is it?" he shouted desperately. "What is it?"

Nobody answered him directly, but everyone was asking that same mysterious question. Somehow or other the concentrated volume of the answer reached his ears like a whisper :

"A cyclone—yes."

"A cyclone," he murmured to himself. But he was not thinking of that; he was aimlessly saying inwardly : "Austral Islands. Or if we miss them, the Cooks and the Society group. Suwarrow and Manihiki and Penrhyn"—the mere phrases he had heard from the second officer but a little while back. Of course, they were meaningless sounds to him ; he mouthed them as a

parrot might have done. They were words without concept with which he paralysed his intellect, as a child is paralysed with fear by imageless bogey-names.

But as nothing immediate happened, his intellect partially recovered. He became aware of certain phenomena, very painfully, like a baby correlating its impressions. He became aware that he was literally soaked to the pelt. He became aware that he was hungry. He became aware that a steady irritating trickle into his left eye was not an independent phenomenon, but was the direct result of a stinging, throbbing wound in his forehead, where something had struck him. He became aware that he was crouching in the break of the saloon, which had so far not been seriously damaged. And, lastly, he became once more aware of such of his fellow-passengers as were near him.

Close beside him was that indomitable fiery old colonel. They might have conversed with an effort, but the colonel would have none of that. Against one of the stanchions which supported the spar-deck, partially sheltered, the old lady whom he had tried to convert to his theories was clinging. She clung like a limpet—it was amazing. And her grey tangled hair slapped her face in sodden masses. Persistently he shouted to her, though she heard not a syllable. "Towards the centre, madam," he yelled indefatigably. "The wind always blows towards the centre of a cyclone." And her indifference only spurred him to more strenuous efforts. It was as if he thought the information tremendously valuable and comforting. It was horribly funny, too. . . .

Incredible as it may seem, Grant must have dozed fitfully. He never let go of his grip, but he dreamed. He dreamed he was back in England, touring its villages once more. He dreamed that he met Ursola there, that

she shyly admitted her love for him—within the van, while a scandalised Mr. Govan raged and stormed at the door. From time to time, of course, he half woke up. He wondered dully if hours or days had gone by since that cyclone had struck them, and then he fell asleep again. But he properly woke up only when his companion (who had been dozing too) renewed his encouraging efforts : “The wind always blows towards the centre of a cyclone, madam.” He blinked his eyes several times and shivered. If you have slept and awakened in a railway-train at night, you will have some slight idea of his sensations.

At once he realised that many hours must have gone by. The absolute darkness had changed to a faint grey twilight which he thought meant dawn. As a matter of fact, it was well past noon ; no light of dawn could pierce such clouds as hid the sky. He thought of the words “Austral Islands,” the first danger which, according to the second officer, menaced them. And at once a resulting thought struck him which he had to voice aloud,

“We’re safe from the Austral Islands, anyway,” he cried to his companion.

Then, as the latter did not heed him, he grew unaccountably angry.

“Hi, sir !” he called, trying to push him with his foot. “Hi, sir, pay attention ! I say, we’re safe from the Austral Islands. . . .”

Again he slept, but this time he did not dream. He slept the sleep of exhaustion, an almost peaceful sleep. When he next woke up it was dark once more and the gale still persisted, driving the ship before it. But the worst of the cyclone was past. . . . Or at least it was passing. . . .

He realised that the colonel had awakened him.

“Look !” said the colonel, pointing.

Grant looked into the darkness, but at first he could see nothing. He thought, however, that his danger must be over, and a feeling of immense relief possessed him. He genuinely wanted to pray. Till presently his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and he perceived a white line of broken cascading water into which they were driving. He closed his eyes hurriedly—shutting out truth till the last.

END OF BOOK I



## BOOK II

### THE DRAMA ON THE ISLAND

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE COMPROMISE

###### I

FROM a world of phantoms, and flitting shadows, and drifting spheres of bright bold colours, Grant gradually escaped, to become aware of the world of reality. It was a dim world at first, sadly confused with his dreams. His first definite apprehension of fact came through a growing conviction that something small and angular which pressed into his spine was too painful in its effects to be anything but material, and from this he rapidly advanced to a clear if transitory perception of faces—a massive, rather vacuous face expressive of supreme contentment, whose advent seemed somehow always to be heralded a little in advance by a preposterously fierce black moustache quite out of keeping with the rest of the face; a lean, brown, strong face with brilliant eyes and a tuft of white beard on its chin; several brown, shining faces, very inquisitive and mobile.

These last came and went incessantly. They were constantly being dispersed like hens by the owner of the black moustache, and were as constantly reappearing. At a slight movement upon Grant's part the owner of the black moustache turned, and approached him rather

doubtfully. Grant performed what he considered a tremendous achievement. By an incredible effort he managed to insert his left-hand palm downward and underneath his back. He sighed triumphantly as it closed upon that irritating object which was disturbing him; it was a pebble.

"*You've* had a bit of a fright, haven't you?" said the man with the black moustache. But his voice, a facetious, aggrieved voice, was in keeping with his expression—not with the moustache.

Grant was very tired. He was so tired that he had never raised his head, never glanced to right or left of him. Speech seemed impossible—like the idea of future marriage to a newly made widower. Yet there were three things vaguely worrying him, and he had to speak.

"How long," he muttered, "have I been like this?"

Fortunately, the other was quite prepared to be brief.

"Oh, just some hours," he replied evasively.

"Where am I?"

"Taro Island, to be sure."

"Who are you?"

"Why, I'm Charlie Darling. Poor old Charlie Darling, at your service."

Grant sighed helplessly and closed his eyes. He knew that he had other worries, more important worries than these. But he had exhausted all his resources.

Charlie Darling drifted off, murmuring something about "looking after some kind of thing to eat."

## II

Grant would have told you to his dying day that his eyes had closed but for a minute. The minute was really an hour. When they opened again he had made a tre-

mendous improvement. Much of his strength had come back to him, and his stiffened joints were gratefully warmed by a blaze of hot sunshine. He was able to take an intelligent interest in what lay before his eyes.

He knew from his position that he was lying at one end of a narrow rectangular room. Straight in front of him was an open door, through which the sunlight was streaming. This door was at the gable end of the room, and he was just able to catch a glimpse of vivid white sand, very smooth, with a smooth lake beyond it of glittering blue water. In the foreground of this picture was a flagstaff from which no flag was flying.

For a while he was entranced by the perfect beauty of it all, but at last he dropped his eyes to his immediate surroundings.

In both of the walls were small square windows; they were really window-frames, however, for there was no glass in them, only an arrangement which vaguely reminded him of Venetian blinds. Through the one upon his right a fairish-sized light green feathery frond, like the frond of a great fern, had shoved its way. And to the right of the door was a rough-hewn wooden chair. And a table after the same lines was pushed against the wall beneath the left window, and upon it lay a mouldering collection of thin paper books, a fibrous something which he decided must be a coco-nut, an incredibly dirty tumbler, and a charred pipe. Along the walls ran a shelf, bearing doubtful indistinguishable objects which he judged to be chiefly rubbish. And in one corner was a heap of rotting banana-skins, black and patched irregularly with a grey, unpleasant fungus. He could see not a single other thing in the room that was detachable. The walls and the floor were of wood, and, of course, he was lying upon his back on the latter.

He studied these phenomena for, it seemed, a long time, but he could not grasp their significance; they baffled him. Presently he grew tired of puzzling his brain uselessly. Anyway, the interior in which he found himself was rather sordid. He relieved the depression it was gradually inducing by looking beyond the room —out at the open door into the gay, painted, sunlit world which suggested itself forcefully through that vivid patch of sand and that rich voluptuous water, prodigally blue. That sensile water affected him very queerly. In a dim sort of way it frightened him, though its outward attractiveness was irresistible. He felt he had a perfectly legitimate reason for dreading water, though he could not remember why.

By some (to him) inscrutable association of ideas the water reminded him of the clothes he was wearing. He lowered his eyes for a minute to his own long body, and he mentally recorded the fact that he was wearing evening-dress. At least, it had once been evening-dress. But it was torn and stained and swollen and shrunken to a blurred, hideous caricature of its natty proper severity. He felt intensely that he should not have been permitted to lie in that condition. He should have been looked after by that fellow—what was his name? Charlie Darling; that was it. A silly, an irritating name. . . .

Then as he pondered the condition of his clothes the last vestiges of his shock left him, and every minute circumstance that had brought him to his present condition obtruded itself upon his consciousness with a rush. He was aghast that he could have forgotten so terrible an experience. He remembered the *Wanaka* and every face that he had met on board of her.

Suddenly he remembered Ursola, and the full strength of his love flowed back to him.

"Ursola!" he demanded aloud of this new, strange world.

A very soft murmur—or was it a delusion?—broke his imagined solitude, like a soft church-bell breaking the stillness of a Sunday in summer; something that hardly differed from the natural noises, something that harmonised with them. But he thought it was a voice from the dead. He started up, and fell back with an involuntary exclamation of pain. Very cautiously he hoisted himself upon his elbow, then upon both his palms, then upon his left knee. Every joint of him protested. But at last he scrambled to his feet, clutching at the table with his right hand, while the whole room whirled dizzily about him. But that passed off in a minute. He peered at the floor in front of him—and saw Ursola.

He was looking at a region now which had hitherto been unexplored, because it lay behind where he had been lying. It comprised the other end of that rectangular room, the end opposite the gable end, and in this end also was a door, though a fibrous mat curtain concealed what lay beyond it. On the floor to the right of this was Ursola, though she had beneath her a mat very similar to the one which hung across the door. She was wearing soiled rags, which Grant identified as the white muslin dress in which he had first seen her. And unconsciously he ticked up mentally another item on the score he was adding against—against *Charles Darling*. "Ineffectual," he angrily summed him up. And he experienced a thrill of gratification at the aptness of the adjective.

But all this went on quite subconsciously, of course. It was merely one of those neat little jobs that everybody's mind performs queerly enough when it is focussed upon some tremendous problem—with the left hand, as it were.

For the moment he voluntarily concerned himself only with Ursola. In a second or two, when that fit of giddiness was quite dissipated, he dropped upon his knees beside her, hardly conscious of the pain entailed by his action.

"Ursola!" he called urgently. "Ursola!" Then, as her breast swelled, as she sighed deeply and stirred: "She's only sleeping!"

It is impossible to convey, no written words could ever convey, the depth of relief and hope which his tone of voice revealed. The arrogance, the miserable arrogance and crudeness of the man, were for once completely obliterated by the pathos of him. There is a pleasurable relief in lingering over him like this—as you linger in a spot of sunlight ere a day of gloomy work is begun. For many days to come his pride was to triumph unchecked, to flaunt itself. As a subject of contemplation he would prove disgusting during these days, were it not for the memory of his love—a passion which has goaded in its time stronger men than he. . . .

"She's only sleeping!" he said.

At these words she sighed and stirred again, and this time she opened her eyes. They opened upon her lover, of course, so she looked no farther. Men and women are usually compared respectively with dogs and cats when a simile from Nature is required. But an instance like this is probably the one instance where the order of things is reversed; for women are like dogs in this, that they do not care where they are so be it that they are beside the men they love. With men, again, it is quite another story. In this respect they resemble cats. For though all the cat-loving spinsters of the world raise a storm of protest at the indictment, it can be successfully maintained that cats, on the average, are not

nearly as attached to persons as to places and environment. Yes. That can be maintained.

Timidly, then—as though she were afraid of breaking some sweet spell—she stretched out her hand till it met his.

“My dear,” she exclaimed slowly. Then a spasm of pain passed over her, as she remembered his neglect.

But she did not withdraw her hand.

“My dear,” she repeated presently, only now her face was sad and she spoke sadly.

A storm of repentance and tenderness swept him. Hitherto he had desired her for her strength and her freshness, but now he desired her for her very weakness.

“Ursola, Ursola!” he called to her, pressing her hand nervously. “Forgive me, Ursola! Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me! I . . . never thought.”

A flicker of perplexity lined her face for a second, but the next instant her instinct had told her what to do. Gently she drew his hand towards her till it pressed against her breast.

So by her simple surrender he was made to suffer more than by any reproaches she might have uttered. He could hardly bear to endure that warm fluttering contact. He was like the man in the fairy story to whom the feather had been given which prevented him telling a lie even though he wanted to do so. Or he felt as a lost soul must feel before the judgment-seat—impelled by something stronger than himself to insist upon everlasting punishment as the one possible sequel to his conduct.

And at the same time he was searching desperately for something—but it must be something true—which would help to extenuate his conduct and to justify in his own eyes his claim to the privilege he was enjoying. Many lame excuses occurred to him, but they were all put aside.

"I—I wanted to save you on the boat," he said suddenly.

She smiled and pressed his hand a little closer :  
"I am so sure of that."

She took it as a matter of course that he would risk his life for her ! She still believed in him with that simple faith of hers ! For a minute or two he was completely humble before her. He had never dreamed of revealing himself to a woman. But the next moment he was doing it.

He told her how Beatrice Ward had loved him, how he had been tempted by her money to ask her to marry him, how he had suffered after their first meeting, how he had suffered since. He would have said much more, but she would not hear of it.

"Of course she would love you," she said wisely.

He did not contradict her, since he felt that way himself. But the next minute :

"But how can you love me ?" she murmured.

And again her humility shamed him.

"Yet if, as you say, you love me," she went on presently.

"I do, I do !" he protested.

She smiled somewhat wearily :

"If, as you say, you love me . . ." She pondered for a little, then : "Then, perhaps—you might wish to marry me," she decided rather timidly. "For I love you, oh, so wonderfully !"

She stopped to contemplate with an almost startled air the obvious passion that her confession had invoked in him. As if to reassure him, she pressed his hand closer to her breast once again. She went on :

"In the convent chapel at Santos—— But oh, we are not at Santos ! We have come very far from there. I

had forgotten." She sighed. "Yet there are priests everywhere," she said, with a touch of her unconscious simplicity. "There are priests everywhere. We must go to a priest—will we not? I will go in to him first, for I am very wicked. Yes. I will go in and confess. And then, my dear, you will go in. You will tell him all—so sorrowfully. And you will make a great act of contrition. And Our Beloved Lord: He will absolve you—by His priest——"

"I will do anything, anything you ask," put in Grant fervently.

He hardly comprehended her. The phrases she used were strange, and her voice was low. But an emotional crisis was upon him. Great heart-breaking emotions which he could not contain rioted within him.

"Anything you say, Ursola," he repeated passionately. "For I love you, I love you, I love you!"

She let him run on like that for a minute, for she would have been no woman had she not enjoyed his protestations. These made up her hour of triumph. For by the very nature of that physical act which symbolises the sacrament, it is the woman's part to surrender to her husband.

And presently, too, she exhibited the Latin side of her nature. There never lived a Latin woman that could brook a rival with perfect equanimity.

"And this—this Miss Ward?" she said, with an admirable assumption of indifference. Then her own warm-heartedness got the better of her mortality, and she went on quickly: "Oh, I am so sorry for her! It must be so terrible not to be loved when one loves." She caught her breath sharply. "But she is dead, she is dead," she whispered.

He nodded slowly, honestly trying to overcome a certain relief that the thought brought him.

"Yes. She must be dead."

"We are all that are left?"

"There is no one else with us. You can see."

She shivered pitifully :

"The—the O'Connells. Katie and Patrick and the rest of them. We must pray much for them. And—and for Miss Ward."

He did not directly reply to this, for he was soberly considering the situation.

"The past is past," he said. "But the future is all our own."

"Some time in the future we will marry?"

He kissed her lips, then rose abruptly.

"In the future—yes. Soon."

### III

At that moment Charlie Darling returned, accompanied by a native bearing food. At the sight of these newcomers Ursola grew confused, attempted to rise hurriedly, but was checked by the pain of her joints, which made her cry out involuntarily. In a moment Grant was all solicitude for her, and he did not trouble about the others till he had tenderly helped her to her feet. Then he stood beside her, facing them, with a strange feeling of a new sort of pride, a clean pride.

He was so completely recovered that his mind was once more receptive to every minute impression. Thus he was able to observe much about Charlie Darling that had previously escaped him. That man had bare, dirty feet. He was dressed with painful simplicity in a pair of ancient, bell-mouthed, white sailor-trousers, some

kind of a soft white shirt that fastened up the chest with laces like a boot, and he was wearing upon his head a great wide-brimmed hat, an imitation panama. His companion, the native, was dressed still more simply. He was wearing a sort of kilt that hung to his knees—and nothing else. He carried a rusty iron tea-tray (a domestic article that was curiously out of place in that savage setting), and on this tray was a variety of foods; the only one of which Grant could identify at the moment was a boiled fish, but the rest of which he subsequently came to recognise as yams, taro, and bread-fruit. His face, of course, was agape with curiosity.

"Well," said Charlie Darling, "so you're both able to sit up and take notice? A nice time you've given poor old Charlie!"

Grant was with every minute becoming more of his normal self. He turned to Ursola.

"This is Mr.—Mr. *Charles* Darling," he explained.

"Oh, no 'Mister' about it," said the subject of the introduction, with his usual injured air. "And it isn't Charles. It's Charlie. Charlie Darling—at your service."

Grant was irritated at the man's want of dignity. Ineffectual! He was more ineffectual than the idea the word conveyed—if that were possible. There was no doubt about it: Charlie Darling was a loathsome, an absurd combination. But for the moment he did not show anything of his annoyance.

He addressed himself to Charlie Darling, and indicated the girl.

"This," he said formally, "is Miss Ursola Cleland. And my name's Grant."

"And now you go on again with your 'Mister' and 'Misses,'" said Charlie Darling plaintively. "I never saw such a man! Introducing people cool as be-

damned on a desert island ! Well, anyway, I'm glad, of course, to know your name, miss—though we've met before a few hours back when neither of you was up to introductions. Bring over the tray, Kaibuke."

At these words the boy advanced with the tray, and Charlie Darling, in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner, was about to transfer one by one each article of food with his dirty hands to the dirtier table.

But Grant proceeded to take up the reins of government.

"Not like that, not like that !" he cried authoritatively. Charlie Darling stopped good-temperedly, and Grant was gratified at this proof of his superior will. "Put the whole tray down," he directed.

Charlie Darling nodded to the boy, who put the tray down.

"And wait a minute !" cried Grant. He turned to the girl. "Are you very hungry, Ursola ?" he asked her.

She shook her head quickly.

"Tired," she almost whispered. "So very tired. I—should wish to lie down again."

"I thought she would be tired," said Grant indignantly to Darling. "It's disgraceful. Her clothes have dried on her. So have mine for that matter. Didn't you know that it is very dangerous—"

"Now ! Now, wait a minute," expostulated Darling, like a big child. "Don't go blaming poor old Charlie for everything. A man can't think of everything at once," he defended himself. "If she wants clothes I dare say we'll be able to get them. Kaibuke 'll show her where."

"Then let him," said Grant loftily.

Darling turned to the boy, who was waiting passively, and addressed him in a soft language which sounded not unlike Italian.

"But she'd much better drink some of this first," he concluded in English, reaching for a jug which emerged at last as a separate object from the chaotic mystery of the shelf.

"What is it?" asked Grant suspiciously.

"Fresh palm toddy," said Darling, as he poured it into the tumbler.

Apparently it pleased Ursola, for she drank it greedily, regardless of the dirty tumbler. It brought a touch of colour into her pale cheeks.

"Thank you," she said, smiling weakly at Darling. Then she turned to Grant. "After I have slept you will come to me?"

He nodded, so she followed the boy, Kaibuke, and disappeared into the sunshine.

Grant waited till she had turned the corner of the door towards the back of the house. Then he directed his attention to Darling.

"I shall eat," he informed him. "I am famished, perfectly famished." He drew the chair to the table and sat down. "While I eat," he unconsciously dictated, "I should like to hear where I am. All about the place, you know. Are you—an official?"

Charlie Darling sat loosely down upon the other chair.

"No," he said, "I'm not an official."

"A—what do you call it? A trader, then?" asked Grant, with his mouth full.

"Eh?"

"I said, are you a trader?"

"No," replied the other; "not that either."

"But you live here?"

"Oh yes; I live here right enough. I've lived here fifteen years."

"Then you must do something," said Grant positively.

"Oh," said the other vaguely, "I muck about—you know. Watch the kiddies playing for a bit. Or you can go up the hill on a clear day—that's a rare view of the sea you get. Or you can sit in the sun. It's wohderful how soothing the sun here is."

"I see," said Grant in a superior sort of way.

In fact, he was beginning to see. He did not actually think of the word *beach-comber*, but he mentally classified the man as a tramp, and that is pretty nearly the same thing. Yes. That was it. The man was only a tropical tramp—and Grant knew all about tramps. He had had a vast experience of them while he toured the villages of England. He knew how to put them in their place. By a few skilful questions he confirmed the impression he had got. And after that he set himself to find out about the island.

Darling was hopelessly given over to circumlocution, but in the end Grant managed to get a fair account of it.

It was quite a small island. There was only one village upon it, and this village contained a steadily diminishing population, which at present numbered twenty-eight adults. This village was located in a bay to the north of the island. Except for Darling, there was no white man resident upon the island, though until about five years before there had been a trader who had done a small trade in copra, bananas, and oranges. But the trader had died. Here Darling became very explanatory and sorrowful. A bad business, it was. Well, suicide. He had had a native wife of whom he had been really fond, and he had come to suspect her of unfaithfulness. He had come upon her alone at night with a man, and had not stopped for explanations. He had shot her promptly in a fit of jealousy, and had discovered only then that the other man was her brother. And

after that he had almost lost his reason. He had shut himself up for nearly twenty-four hours without eating a bite, and at the end of that time had thrown himself over the cliffs at the south side of the island. "Rare high cliffs they are," said Darling. "You must see them."

It was at the south side of the island that the *Wanaka* had been wrecked. The island was almost completely surrounded by a fairish-sized lagoon bounded by a reef. Almost, but not quite. For at the south side the reef split up into hundreds of irregular pieces—flat tables of coral and jagged needles—and filled the whole of what should have been the lagoon right up to the foot of the cliffs over which the unfortunate trader had thrown himself. At the top of the cliffs the ground rose still higher to the crest of a hill. From the crest of this hill it sloped easily till it reached sea-level about half a mile behind the village, and from that point to the village it was flat and supported coco-nut palms and orange-groves which the trader had planted. The village was built at the west of the bay. The house in which Grant was had been the trader's house, into which Darling had placidly removed about a year after its owner's death.

"You ones had a fine near thing of it, though," said Darling grudgingly. "Kaibuke and I found you on a flat rock after the tide fell—on a grating you was. You wouldn't have had a chance if you'd been washed against the cliffs."

"I quite understand," said Grant, who was finished eating by now. "I'm very grateful, of course."

"Oh, you needn't be grateful," said Darling, somewhat fatuously. "Kaibuke brought me wind of the wreck, and I trotted over to see what I could pick up.

I could do fine with some iron. And tobacco now—you haven't any tobacco?"

Quite mechanically Grant put a hand to his breast pocket. Then he shook his head. He was rather glad that he was not called upon for a great show of gratitude.

"I find I have some money," he said formally. "I'll buy you some if you like."

"And where do you think you'll buy it?"

Grant raised his eyebrows.

"Well," he replied, "I imagine boats of some sort call here regularly."

The other shook his head :

"Not they. What for would they come visiting poor old Charlie Darling now the trader's dead? We had a big canoe in here, though, about two months back. It'll be about seven months before a steamer comes near the place."

"But somewhere near? Surely there must be other islands?"

"Oh yes," said Darling; "there's other islands—smaller than this, though. The nearest big island is Penrhyn, and that's over a hundred miles to the west. You ones 'll have just to put up with Taro Island—for seven months, at any rate."

Grant pondered the situation in this new light that had been cast upon it. Slowly, but quite methodically, he was formulating a great idea. Upon this forgotten island, rarely visited, he might reign as a sort of king. For he had no ties in England. And the woman he loved was beside him. And in Charlie Darling he had a potential servant, soft and easily led. . . .

A reminiscence of his school-days occurred to him here. Darling was a sort of amiable Caliban, and the rôle of Stephano was temptingly vacant. . . .

"Show me the village," he said, rising; and his tone was arbitrary, reflecting unconsciously the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

Charlie Darling rose reluctantly.

"But I'd better have a look at the other ones first," he said. Then, as he saw the different shades of astonishment that Grant's expression was betraying: "Didn't you know? No, of course you didn't. I forgot to tell you, and now poor old Charlie 'll get the blame as usual."

I—I didn't expect," said Grant, whose dream of sovereignty had been dissipated in a flash.

"No," said Darling heartily, for he seemed greatly relieved that he was not to be blamed. "No. To be sure you didn't. I forgot to tell you, of course. Oh, I can tell you, though, there aren't many of them! These cliffs of ours don't give you much chance. This way, if you don't mind."

"They're in here?" cried Grant, almost hysterical for the moment.

For Darling was leading the way to that curtained door which obviously led to an inner room, and there is nothing more unnerving than the discovery that you have been constantly in the presence of others while you thought yourself alone.

"To be sure they are," said Darling. "They came round long before you did. And had something to eat and drink. And went to sleep again."

He held back the mat which screened the door, and Grant entered, half-fearful of the faces he would see. He found himself in a room exactly similar in size and shape to the one he had just left. But it contained a large double bedstead, roughly made, and a horsehair sofa, the springs of which were protruding in parts. In this

room were three men, all of whom were sleeping heavily. Two of them lay upon the bed and one upon that awful bristling sofa. He looked anxiously at their faces, but none of them were important to him. Two of the men were sailors whom he vaguely remembered, and the other man was a passenger—second-class or steerage, he was not sure which.

"The other one's in the tool-house," said Charlie Darling.

"The tool-house!" said Grant—quite mechanically, for he was concerned solely with the identity of "the other one."

But Darling mistook his meaning :

"Now, don't be blaming me for that. You couldn't expect a hotel all ready waiting—you really couldn't. It hasn't been used for a tool-house for five years, you know. I've slept in it myself on very hot nights. She'll be comfortable enough."

"She!" muttered Grant dully.

He saw that the other was about to begin one of his rambling explanations. He could not bear that just then. He cut him short :

"Never mind. Show me."

So, with much grumbling, Charlie Darling led the way back into the other room, through the outer door, into the open air. Then he developed an exaggerated air of caution, tiptoed like the villain of a comic opera, and indicated a small adjoining shed with a gesture for silence.

"Look through the window," he whispered.

Grant did so. And in the twilit dustiness of that shed he saw Miss Ward—sound asleep.

## IV

"Shall I waken her up?" asked Charlie Darling.

But Grant did not notice the question, for his brain was in a tumult. It was all very well to speak and think magnanimously of a dead nuisance. But the nuisance had come to life again. The whole miserable situation that had existed on board of the *Wanaka* was revived once more—only now it was even more miserable than ever, more heart-breaking. For a moment or two his faculties were completely arrested. He was stunned.

She was lying upon her left side, so if she opened her eyes she was almost bound to see him. He felt he should move away, but all initiative had forsaken him. Her black glossy hair was tumbled about her shoulders, and her pale face, what with exposure and the contrast of the hair, looked paler than its wont—pinched and older, too. The sea had stripped her of her skirts, and from the waist downwards she was covered only by a pair of frilled knickerbockers which had once been white.

"Shall I waken her up?" asked Charlie Darling once more.

And this time Grant heard. He stepped cautiously away from the window and turned upon Darling in a fury of disappointment, venting his dismay upon him.

"Certainly not!" he said in a low, angry voice. "And how dare you leave a lady like that? Couldn't you have covered her? Had you no clothes——?"

"All right, all right," the other defended himself, getting in a word at last. "That's all right. Poor old Charlie gets the blame, of course. How can I act as a lady's-maid? And how can I think of everything? A

rare job we had of it getting you ones across the island. And as for clothes, the clothes you was wearing was dry before we started to bring you over. We rolled you about in them till you all were warm and dry. But that doesn't matter, of course. Poor old Charlie gets it all the same."

But Grant's temper had subsided as quickly as it had risen.

"Has she recovered yet?" he asked dully.

And Darling reassured him :

"Recovered? To be sure she has. She came round before you others while we trotted you across the island. She drank a pull of palm toddy, and asked for some clothes. Then she went to sleep before she remembered she hadn't got them."

"Then she knows I'm living. Did she—" He broke off dispiritedly : "No. It doesn't matter."

He had been about to ask for particulars of her behaviour, but he could well imagine it for himself. He knew how she loved him. He knew the endearing names she must have lavished upon his unconscious self. He knew how she must have kissed him. The thought of it all maddened him. He could not bear to hear the details of it from Charlie Darling's lips.

"Where's Miss Cleland?" he asked miserably. Then, as the other did not comprehend : "Go on; Miss Cleland. The lady you had put me beside."

"All right, all right," said Darling, obediently leading the way. "I never saw such a man for jumping about, though." He grinned over his shoulder, and his preposterously fierce moustache looked more artificial than ever. "Kaibuke 'll have put her in a place at the other end of the village. I told him to. There's a sort of a tapu upon it, so she won't be bothered with the kiddies.

That's where the trader shot his wife, and they won't go near the place."

He led the way through the hive-shaped houses, which hummed like the hives they resembled and emptied forth their entire population. Sullen, shaggy-haired, long-legged girls and brown, naked children, with their eyes gleaming with excitement, formed an incomprehensible gabbling escort for Grant. But they all forsook him as he reached one of the houses somewhat isolated from its neighbours.

"She's in there," said Charlie Darling.

Grant nodded.

"Very well. You can go."

"And a good job too," said Darling. "Maybe I'll get forty winks or so now. I've been up most of the night, what with you ones coming ashore like you did. I'll see you again in an hour or two."

He turned and slouched off without another word. From where Grant stood he could still see the roof of the tool-house where Miss Ward was sleeping. Beside him was that hive-shaped house thatched with pandanus-leaves, and in it Ursola was sleeping too. So he was left in the very interesting situation of literally standing between two women—a visible manifestation, as it were, of his mental predicament.

He surveyed that tropical island sombrely. A few yards away his bodyguard had grouped themselves, watching him expectantly as though they anticipated the ghost of the murdered woman coming to snatch this queer intrepid stranger. His back was to the sea. Before him stretched a forest of palm-trees, apparently inebriated, for they sloped in every direction at crazy fantastic angles. Crimson and blue flowers tangled riotously at their roots. In the background rose the low

hill, brilliantly green to its very summit. The fierce morning sun beat upon everything steadily, binding the colours together in a glittering golden blaze.

Suddenly he turned abruptly to the house.

"Ursola!" he called softly through the big doorway.

There was a stifled yawn, a little exclamation of surprise, and then the rustling of cloth.

"Yes," came her voice at last. "I shall be out in a minute."

But at this Grant's nerve failed him. He could not say what he had to say before that restless, critical audience of native boys and girls.

"No, no," he replied quickly. "May I not come in? I am sorry to wake you so soon. But I must tell you something. And I can't talk out here. . . ."

"You may now come in," Ursola said sedately, after a little.

He passed through the arched door, blinking at the contrast, for there were no windows in the house. But presently his eyes grew accustomed to the half-light which prevailed, and he was able to make out Ursola. There was a pile of mats beside her, from which she had obviously just arisen. She was wearing some sort of a thin dark blue pinafore which fastened down the front with large white buttons. She had put up her hair after a fashion—probably in the few seconds which had gone by since Grant had awakened her. And she looked more rested, despite the short sleep she had had.

She stretched out her hands half-timidly to her lover, but he was too miserable to kiss her.

"She's living," he said, standing listlessly in the doorway.

With a faultless instinct, she caught his meaning instantly.

"Miss—Miss Ward?"

He nodded anxiously, and her face grew very pale once again.

"Miss Ward," she repeated. Then, covering her face with the palms of her hands: "Oh, I am a wicked girl! I ought to be glad. Glad!"

He crossed the floor in a couple of strides, took her by the wrists, and tried to uncover her face.

"No, Ursola," he said heavily. "What is the use of pretending? Why try to be glad? It's . . ."

He broke off helplessly and released her wrists. With that unconscious perversity that a woman will display even upon her death-bed, she lowered her hands the moment he had given up trying to make her do so. Before the cold misery of her face he involuntarily took a step backward. She must have thought he was about to leave her, for the next instant her arms were about his neck.

"Oh, my dear . . . dearest dear!" she sobbed. "Darling . . .!" Her cheeks reddened suddenly, and she flung away from him, dropping half-recumbent upon the pile of mats, in which she buried her face, and then becoming absolutely motionless. The next moment he was down upon his knees beside her. She jerked herself round upon her right side and took him in her arms once more. She drew his face down to hers. Her hair had fallen, and his senses were steeped in its fragrance.

She began to stammer disconnectedly:

"She shan't have you! No; never was I like this before! I was a child. You have killed me—and born me again as a woman. But no—she shall not have you. . . ."

He kissed her hot, wet cheeks:

"Never, Ursola! Never, I say! Never!"

Suddenly she released him and sat up quietly.

"No," she went on. "Yes, indeed I am a wicked girl. That is wrong talk."

"Wrong!" he echoed her in dismay.

She nodded sadly.

"Wrong. But we have made our love wrong. It was such a beautiful thing, too—so wonderful. But we have made of our love wrong. It is—such a tragedy."

She pondered him for a moment, and then went on :

"And now we must make it right." She hesitated, and then decided abruptly : "You must tell Miss Ward the truth—everything. Why you can never marry her. That you love me."

"I—I can't do that!" he cried in alarm. "Good heavens, Ursola, I can't! Why, don't you see—" He stopped. His panic was so pitiful that even she, blinded as she was by her love, must have noticed it in a minute. He saw that, and stopped in time. He changed what he was about to say and went on, hiding his fear :

"Don't you see that we can never marry if I tell her that we love?"

She shook her head, so he continued quickly :

"Ah, Ursola, but it is true! I don't like to boast about it, of course, but she loves me terribly. She—she may give me up, if I—well, if I suggest that. But not if she is to give me up to marry someone else. Come!" he concluded, taking heart from her hesitation. "Could she bear to see me as your lover? For seven months? We shall be here for seven months, you know." And he rapidly sketched the situation as he had had it from Charlie Darling.

She did not listen very attentively to his recital, but it gave her time to realise all the trouble that a refusal from Miss Ward might cause. This was what he had

expected, too. He was deliberately playing upon her love for him, in order to persuade her to silence about the relations between them. He loved her very fervently, of course. He loved her better than himself—but not, unhappily, than his pride. Pride still meant more to him than anything else in the world—or out of it. Yet he loved her well enough to risk a great deal to have her. So he was scheming for a compromise, whereby he might win her and yet save his pride with Miss Ward.

As he came to an end of his story, her confidence and serenity gradually left her.

“Yes, yes,” she cried in a rapid, distracted voice. “When she knows that we are lovers she will not let you go. She will try to have you then. A woman, she could not stand that. Oh, I could stand losing you! But not to another woman—no, not that. I—I could not pray for you then. Oh, what must I do? What must I do?”

Grant was quick to seize his opportunity.

“Why, do nothing,” he replied. “Or at least you must only watch yourself. See that by look or word or action you don’t let her know we are lovers. And leave the rest to me.”

“You will say that you do not love her? But not that you love me—till you are out of her reach?”

Grant nodded slowly. He was not unduly put out at the prospect, for he had a simple alternative to that, a much more pleasant alternative.

## V

About six hours later Grant sought Miss Ward at the two-roomed wooden house in which he had first awakened. As he slowly approached the door, the red sun was dipping

into the sea, though the atmosphere was still clear—not opaque, like a sunset atmosphere in England. The door was still open, so he saw her while he was approaching. She was sitting listlessly by the rough wooden table, expecting him, for he had sent a message by Charlie Darling that he would come at that hour.

He anticipated that she would literally throw herself at him with sobs and many endearments. He was prepared to suffer that—for the last time. But he had not allowed for the shock the sea had given her. Ursola and he were younger than she, and stronger. And she had had the misfortune to regain temporarily her faculties while Darling and the natives were bringing her across the island. She was paying for this too speedy recovery by a great reaction, and she looked ghastly as she sat there—dressed, by the way (there was a delicate elusive irony in this) in the counterpart of Ursola's dark blue pinafore. Probably both the costumes were legacies from the trader's defunct wife.

As he entered the house she raised her eyes to his for a moment, but she did not get up—she was too weak for that. For a second or two he stood mutely before her, wondering how he should begin. Then :

"I have not kissed you, Beatrice," he said in a queer harsh voice.

"No," she assented heavily.

And, emboldened by her acquiescence, he went on quickly :

"Beatrice, I shall never kiss you again. Can you bear that?"

This time what he expected happened, for she jumped trembling to her feet, swayed for a moment, and then slowly sat down again, overcome by the effort. Terrified, she stared at him with great incredulous eyes.

"Ah, wait, Beatrice!" he cried nervously. "Don't reproach me! Don't say things you would give your life presently to have left unsaid. It's—incredibly difficult to tell you. But I—I can't marry you."

She rose cautiously at this, and crossed the room till she stood directly in front of him. It flashed through his mind that, with her graceful carriage and her air of money and breeding, she introduced a flavour of an English drawing-room into that savage apartment. There was something bizarre about the situation for a moment. . . . She gazed at him intently.

"Don't you love me?" she asked in a low vibrant voice.

For just a second or two he hesitated. And it is significant of the change his love for Ursola had effected in him that he did hesitate. A few weeks before he would have said what eventually he was to say without a moment's doubt. But now it occurred to him that no power but that of his own will could prevent him speaking the truth. He might tell her bluntly and honestly that he did not love her, as Henderson had advised him to do. He might own up frankly to the conspiracy of which he had made her the victim.

But the crucial moment passed, and his resolution failed him. Inwardly he shivered at the humiliation that would entail. He turned in a panic from the prospect of her raging jealousy and her bitter, unanswerable reproaches. It was one thing to reveal himself to Ursola whom he loved, another thing to beg humbly for forgiveness from a woman before whom he had posed as perfect.

"You know that I love you, Beatrice," he muttered. "I love you as—as you love me. What more can I say?"

She laughed—wildly and quite inconsequentially. Before the bitterness of that laugh he winced and started

involuntarily to defend himself. Yet before he could do so :

"Then why—why ?" she exclaimed hysterically.

He half-turned his head and pointed to his neck. Those glands which had driven him, limp with terror, to Henderson had swollen again with his exposure. Then he dropped his hand and turned to face her once more.

"I have cancer," he said in an unnatural voice.

That was the simple alternative which had occurred to him. He had hailed it with joy and relief, for it had seemed so easy a way of settling the situation satisfactorily, and yet of saving his pride. There was no one to contradict his assertion, for Henderson was dead, and there was not a doctor upon the island. Ursola would be silent about their love, so that would never be known. In seven months a ship would call, and Miss Ward and the three other survivors would be carried away from the island. But he would remain, for what could be more natural than that he should elect to hide his disease in such a lonely place? And Ursola would remain too, of course—she could miss the boat. Afterwards someone might suspect, but he did not mind that. It was direct humiliation that he feared. . . .

"I have cancer," he said.

Perfectly frozen, she stared at him for an instant. Then she recoiled from him as though he had offered to strike her. She loosely collapsed by the table, dropping her head upon it and sobbing wildly and hysterically. Immediately he feared that she doubted him, and immediately his last scruple left him.

He began to try desperately to make his deception plausible. Some curious dramatic instinct took hold of him, and he almost believed in its truth.

"Beatrice," he protested, "be calm ! Be calm ! If it

were not for this—this cancer, nothing would stop me from marrying you. Nothing——”

“I know, I know,” she gasped.

He was greatly relieved at this.

“And nothing would keep you from me,” he went on. “I know that, too. I can well understand how you love me. But——”

“There is no—no doubt?” she put in here.

She had abandoned her sobbing now. She had sat up again—paler and more shaken than ever. He shook his head :

“None.” And he rapidly detailed—fairly accurately, too—his fears on the boat, and his interview with Henderson. Only, of course, he led her to suppose that Henderson had confirmed his fears, instead of laughing at them as he had done.

“You must never kiss me again,” he concluded. (There was a certain satisfaction in listening to his own voice stating so delightful a fact.) “You must never touch me, even. We shall be seven months upon this island. But you have talked with that fellow Darling. He will have told you about that. Well, for seven months we must be together on the island. But I—I shall go to another part of it, if possible. And I shall not leave with the boat. I shall wait at least till it calls again. I shall spare you that second voyage together—and myself, of course. . . .”

He stopped. Her silence amazed him. For more than thirty seconds they eyed one another mutely. Then, with unexpected energy, she stood up and held out her hand.

“Good-bye,” she said suddenly, and in a low, colourless tone.

He barely touched her fingers. He was watching her

expression anxiously, fearing that the shock would kill her. That would be a terrible memory to carry about for life.

"Good-bye," she said again, looking him strangely in the eyes.

"I—I hope," he began to stammer.

But :

"Good-bye," she repeated, in the same colourless way.

Abruptly she turned her back upon him. He realised with a curious sense of detachment that the momentous interview was closed. . . .

He walked slowly to the door, too disconcerted to classify his emotions for the moment. But an extraordinary sense of lightness, of freedom, was predominant—that at least was certain.

Across the darkening lagoon, over the barrier reef, gentle waves were breaking with a foam that was like white lace. The land-breeze stirred the palm-tops, and they rustled uneasily, as though they were stirring in their sleep. From the path that led from the hill an active, determined figure (like a scarecrow) was advancing, and it raised an assuring hand to Grant, as though it were cheerful to the last.

"Mr. Govan," he whispered breathlessly.

That active, tenacious figure seemed like some horrid incarnation of his troubles, like some appointed torment which he never could shake off.

## CHAPTER II

### MR. GOVAN'S CONCERN

#### I

As Mr. Govan came nearer, he waved his arm again. He shouted hoarsely. Grant could not make out what he said, but he knew instinctively it was something tremendously encouraging and cheerful. That cry raised the villagers—positively it raised them; they seemed to start out of the ground like a swarm of disturbed flies. The children tumbled over one another in their anxiety to reach him first. He gathered the dirtiest he could find into his big protecting arms. It might have been a pretty sight, had the action been absolutely spontaneous. But Grant thought bitterly that he seemed to select the dirtiest deliberately, as though to make manifest his steady, courageous Christian indifference to all such petty considerations.

At the tumult which had arisen, Miss Ward came to the door. She did not speak. But she was literally trembling, and she watched Mr. Govan's approach with wide, eager eyes, and her lips were dry and parted. Charlie Darling presently appeared from nowhere in particular; by the look of him he had probably been sleeping. ("Forty winks or so. I've been up most of the night what with you ones coming ashore.") He joined Miss Ward and Grant in a dazed sort of way, muttering something or other about "the place being turned into a health resort," and "another of them to bother poor old

Charlie." Then he subsided philosophically. There occurred one of those little pauses that happen sometimes in life—as though life were indeed a play, as though an act were set, and the actors idled upon the stage waiting for the rise of the curtain.

Mr. Govan's big face was as resolutely cheerful as ever. He smiled unquenchably from afar. Apparently his soul was unchanged by his vicissitudes. But if that were so, his body at least had been affected. His hands and face were hacked and dirty. One of his shoes was missing, and the other might have been picked off a refuse-heap. Collar, coat, and waistcoat had disappeared, and his shirt was half stripped, leaving bare his right shoulder and his neck, about which a villainous, sodden cravat still clung. Only his trousers were decorous—they were ragged and torn, yet decorous. You felt that his sense of decency was perfectly indomitable. Even the winds and the waves dared not encroach upon that.

He reached the silent group which awaited him, and with a dexterous movement disengaged himself from the clamorous, insistent children.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "John and Beatrice!" He caught up a hand of each of them in each of his hands. "Well, now, that's a sight for Mr. Govan's sore eyes—and I can tell you they are sore!" He became tremendously solemn, and went on: "It's a merciful escape we've all had. The Lord was angry, but He pardoned His children when they called upon Him. But I knew you would be saved, Beatrice. I knew you would be saved, John. A great love like yours is sweet in the nostrils of the Almighty. He has brought you up unharmed from the deep, that you both may be together for all time."

A bitter thought here occurred to Grant. "You speak

like a second-rate psalm," he would have liked to have said, but he did not do so.

"But I must tell you——" he began nervously.

But Mr. Govan disregarded the interruption with perfect assurance:

"Now, John, you don't need to tell me anything. Mr. Govan understands absolutely. Surely you know that! You dearly love Beatrice. And Beatrice loves you. The Lord has preserved you that you may marry. And He's preserved, besides, His unworthy servant, Mr. Govan—to help you to do it."

He breathed heavily for a moment. Then:

"Are there any more saved with you?" he added.

"Four," replied Grant, rather abstractedly, for just then his mind was working upon other lines. "Four. Two sailors. A second-class passenger named Timms. And—and there's a steerage passenger as well. A—a girl she is. I think her name's Cleland."

Mr. Govan nodded many times.

"The Lord," he declared, "will not despise even the least of His children."

For the first time since his arrival, Miss Ward spoke.

"And with you?" she asked in a low, penetrating voice. "With you?"

Mr. Govan shook his head sorrowfully:

"Not one."

"Not Dr. Henderson?" cried Grant, to whom an awful thought had come. If Henderson lived, he was shamed and discredited. His story about his cancer would be disproved. His plan would be ruined.

But Mr. Govan quickly reassured him:

"Not one, as far as I know. And most surely not Dr. Henderson. My own eyes saw him perish. The hand of the Lord falls heavily upon them that scoff at Him."

"You've no right to say that!" cried Miss Ward shrilly. Then, as Mr. Govan, hurt and sorrowful, fell back before her fury: "He was John's friend," she said.

It seemed for a moment that Mr. Govan was going to be angry with her. But the next moment he smiled forgivingly. He gently retrieved the hand which she had instinctively snatched from his.

"That's right, that's right," he breathed unctuously. "Stand up for John's friends. I'm sorry I said what I did. Stand up for the friends of the man who will be your husband, Beatrice."

## II

Simply, Grant did not know what to say to this for the moment. So he created a diversion by introducing Mr. Govan to Charlie Darling in a perfunctory sort of way. Mr. Govan gripped the latter's hand with an intensity that gave the latter something to think about, some material cause for his usual injured expression. He became very loquacious and explanatory, till Grant ordered him away to see about some clothes for Mr. Govan.

That latter extraordinary man was in no particular hurry. It might reasonably have been expected of him that he would have wanted food or sleep after his adventures. But apparently he had long since triumphed over all such human weaknesses. His spirit was quite irrepressible. After Darling had gone slackly away (scattering the children before him as though they were his hens), he invaded that two-roomed wooden house which had tacitly been surrendered to Miss Ward. Grant followed him. And after seats of a kind had been found, he proceeded to describe his adventures.

When the ship struck he had been somewhere below—

"trying to exhort a few friends into the fear of the Lord." He had at once abandoned this pursuit in favour of discovering what was happening on deck. The man was sublime in his assurance. He walked blandly through life, as though life regarded him as its cherished patriarch. He was always perfectly sure that no one could be displeased with him, nothing could want to hurt him. So it is hardly surprising that scarcely had he stepped upon deck when a great wave washed him overboard—hardly surprising, since it appeared that he had held on to nothing, made no effort to save himself.

He did not describe how he felt in the sea. Was it possible that sincerity had confronted the man for once--like an apparition, like a ghost suddenly materialising before the eyes of a materialist? Something of the kind must surely have happened, for unconsciousness was not instantaneous. An intricate mass of spars had bobbed rapidly past him, and he had grasped at it desperately and had got on top of it somehow, with torn and bleeding fingers. The impetus he had given to this dubious raft had driven it into a pool, a sort of backwater circling at the base of a rock. This was not safety, rather was it a refinement of his torture; for he drifted farther and farther towards the boundary of the eddy. While he was thus drifting he had of necessity become a spectator of the drama into which he was presently to be cast. He had seen despairing faces, like the faces of mad puppets, jerked up and down in the water by some unseen giant's hand. It was then that he saw Henderson's face, and he had had little time to see anything more. For at last his respite ended. The sea caught him and drove him before it at a pitiless rate—till he struck something solid, till his raft fell over on top of him and he lost consciousness.

That was all he knew about the wreck.

When he regained consciousness it appeared that he thought he was in Paradise. A warm sun had cajoled him back to life, and the fury of the sea had abated; there was only an uneasy swell upon it. He was lying on his back with a part of his raft still half on top of him. From this, with much pain and difficulty, he had at last extricated himself and had managed to stand up. Quite miraculously he had found he had been cast upon a little pebbled beach between two masses of rock. The tide had by then fallen. He was able to get ashore. And then he had somehow scrambled along the foot of the cliffs till he came to lower ground. Then he had wandered in the forest for a little, had eaten some berries, and had fallen into a deep sleep. When he had awakened from that sleep he had known by the sun it was late. He had wandered once more, quite aimlessly, till he had struck the path from the hill which led to the village.

Such was the man's story. He had blundered into safety as a dull yokel might blunder through a picket which trained scouts were unable to elude. Grant did not actually wish that he had been drowned, but he found himself wishing he were anywhere but where he was—and that was almost the same thing. But he did not show this, of course. With a new, perfect self-control at which he secretly marvelled, he said the proper conventional things. And after that he sketched the situation on the island—quite lucidly, it would appear, though his thoughts were far away. At the end of his account, Mr. Govan summed up the situation characteristically. He said :

"And so John and Beatrice, with all their adventures behind them, wait for the boat that will carry them off to their honeymoon."

## III

That roused Grant's attention. He could not let this kind of thing go on. To do so would be very dangerous, he thought. And, further, the irony of such talk was enough to kill his reason. He was tempted to let the remark pass, to put off an explanation till the morrow, but he laid the temptation aside. This did not mean that there was any vital change in his character. Merely, he was desperate through love, as he had been desperate through fear some weeks before, on the boat, when he faced for a day or so the prospect of hard work because it seemed the only means to idleness.

He came to an abrupt decision.

"Mr. Govan," he said firmly, "I must tell you something now."

At once Mr. Govan became attentive, strenuously attentive. He leaned eagerly forward.

"And Beatrice, too?" he suggested, with a side-long glance at Beatrice.

"Beatrice knows."

"She knows?"

"Yes," said Grant.

And at this Mr. Govan relaxed his attention somewhat. It was almost as if he were disappointed. He half closed his eyes and spoke in a queer sing-song voice.

"Well, go on," he said—"go on. Mr. Govan's listening. Go on."

Heaven knows what the man had expected to hear. His belief in his own perspicacity was touched only by his belief in "the terrible power of temptation." He was always expectant of a scandal. Yet, as Grant had been conscious on the island for less than twelve hours, it is difficult to see in what fresh scandal he could have been

involved. Yet Mr. Govan's imagination was indefatigable. It is quite likely that he was bracing himself for some horrid disclosure of a temptation inspired by one of the native women! His veiled side-long look at Miss Ward and his suppressed eagerness surely justified the assumption. Yes. It is quite likely.

"You must know," began Grant. He hesitated for the right word, then tried afresh: "Perhaps I ought to tell you—"

But Miss Ward cut him short while he was still hesitating.

"John has cancer," she said, repressing all emotion with an effort. "He can't marry me because of that. That is what he wants to tell you."

If Grant thought that Mr. Govan's officiousness would be cured by this, he did so only for a moment. There are doctors who delight in disease because it gives them something with which to occupy themselves. Happily, such doctors are very rare. But they exist. If Mr. Govan had been a doctor, and not an electrical engineer, he would undoubtedly have taken an unctuous pleasure in disease. He seemed positively to revel in this fresh opportunity for taking Grant under his protection. He assumed an expression of extreme concern, but beneath that concern the pleasurable excitement he was occasioned was quite obvious to Grant. Mr. Govan rose. He positively rushed at Grant and gripped him firmly by an arm.

"My poor lad!" he exclaimed sorrowfully. "I—I am pained. I am shocked terribly—shocked beyond words. This can't be true."

As Mr. Govan had hit the nail upon the head, Grant very wisely said nothing. Presently the former went on:

"Where is it?"

In his heart Grant was cursing Mr. Govan, fiercely

cursing him again and yet again. He wondered vaguely what he could ever have seen in the man. He wished he had never struck up an intimacy with him. He wished passionately that he had heeded Henderson when the latter, at the very outset of the voyage, had warned him against Mr. Govan. He felt profoundly that he never would have risked the subterfuge of pretending to cancer had he known that the subterfuge would have to be worked upon Mr. Govan.

But now he had started he must go on.

"Here," he replied ungraciously, indicating his neck.

For another that might have been enough, but it was not so for Mr. Govan. He examined the neck carefully, breathing down it as he did so, and tore himself away from it with reluctance.

"Are you quite, quite sure, John?" he asked. "The swelling's so terribly big. Mightn't it be a blow, now? Or perhaps you've caught cold?"

Something gripped Grant by the throat, and for a second or two he was in sheer despair. Mr. Govan had blundered upon the truth immediately. It was the end of the whole scheme. But that was only for a second or two. Despair sharpened his wits and brought him inspiration. Something seemed to speak for him, or at least put the words in his mouth. He was able to reply glibly, without hesitation or contradiction.

"Oh yes," he said quietly: "I daresay I have caught cold in my neck. But I'm afraid the other thing's there too—there's no doubt about that. Henderson said it might make my neck liable to swell easily."

"Dr. Henderson?"

"Yes. I went to consult him on the boat, you know."

"And he declared it to be cancer?"

"Yes."

Grant paused here for a little, wondering, as the God Who read him like a book must have wondered, at the terrible hypocrisy of what he was saying. In a queer sort of way he was annoyed at his own depravity. It was very sad that he should have to talk like this. Curiously enough, he experienced a stabbing spasm of anger against Mr. Govan. It was all Mr. Govan's fault for being so unnecessarily persistent. In a moment he hated him, as he had once hated him for an instant on the boat. Only now that feeling of hatred did not presently leave him, as it had formerly done. It persisted.

Yet the descent to Avernus is easy, and even as he shook his head at his own hyprocisy a refinement of that hypocrisy suggested itself, and was immediately accepted. For there was no use in doing things by halves. He had either to sacrifice his pride or to convince Mr. Govan absolutely that he really suffered from cancer. When the sacrifice had been less comprehensive he had still felt incapable of facing it—so now, of course, he felt more incapable than ever. He would not humble himself; he refused to exhibit himself in his true colours. So he deliberately turned his back upon his scruples and went on presently, quite pleased with himself for his powers of invention :

"Ah, Mr. Govan, what I suffered on the boat ! You can have no conception ; from my own point of view I almost welcomed the wreck. You may perhaps have noticed I avoided your company somewhat. Yes, and Beatrice's too. I admit it. But can you wonder ? Can you blame me ? When I knew the disease that was killing me. When I knew that it meant—a parting."

Then a delightfully convincing little bit of business occurred to him.

"But I can't do it," he cried hoarsely, half starting towards Miss Ward. Then he restrained himself: "But I forgot. I must. Our marriage is quite impossible."

Mr. Govan pressed his arm fervently.

"Never!" he encouraged him. "Don't say that, John! Have you forgotten Mr. Govan? Have you gone, in the midst of your great trouble, and forgotten old Mr. Govan? Don't you remember what I promised on the boat? That I'd watch over both of you, see that nothing separated you? Well, now, John, I'm stancher than that, I hope! Well, now, John, I thought you'd have known that!"

Grant shook his head, and murmured something to the effect that "it was very generous to talk like that, but he must not trouble." But Mr. Govan was almost boisterous by now, and would not listen. That mellow, intelligent voice of his was growing firmer and firmer.

"Nonsense, John!" he replied. "A true servant of the Lord never gives in. Now, I can't remember if I've told you this, but I've four young people of my own in Southport. Just you imagine how I'd feel if this sort of thing had happened to Lucy, Violet, Julia—or little Hetty. Well now, I feel the same about you."

"It's very kind of you, of course—" Grant began.

But again Mr. Govan interrupted him:

"Now, John, don't say it! I know what you are going to say, but you're quite wrong. You shall have your Beatrice safe and sound. You shall marry her yet. Make up your mind to that. Cancer can be cured if it gets attention in time."

Grant smiled. Sentimentalists would have said that he smiled wanly. The adjective is disgusting in the extreme. Yet it is the only one which exactly conveys his expression.

"Yes," he agreed sadly. "If it gets attention in time, perhaps. But I've told you that we must expect to be seven months here. And there's no doctor upon the island."

"Then," said Mr. Govan positively, "we must get off the island. We must leave the island at once."

"But how—" Grant was beginning.

But Miss Ward interrupted passionately. During the foregoing conversation she had steadily been growing paler. Now she could bear the strain no longer.

"Ah, don't you understand?" she said in a low, constrained voice. "You—you torture me. The nearest big island is a hundred miles away. And there's no boat here; nothing but a few small canoes."

"You see," added Grant sombrely. "It is Fate."

But Mr. Govan would not be convinced. Big, forceful, and impassive, he stood over Grant, dominating his will like the Fate to which Grant had alluded. Yes. He seemed for a moment more sinister and inexorable than Fate—and, curiously enough, he gave colour to this fancy by his very next words.

"Then Mr. Govan will beat Fate," he said obstinately. "We haven't begun to try yet."

He breathed heavily. He clapped an assuring hand upon Grant's shoulder.

"Why, we've only Mr. Darling's word!" he concluded heartily. "Trust Mr. Govan to find out for himself, though. And meantime not a word to the others."

## CHAPTER III

### FURTHER CONCERN OF MR. GOVAN

#### I

MR. GOVAN'S unexpected arrival and Mr. Govan's subsequent refusal to be limited by mere circumstances of time and space—these had profoundly unsettled Grant, so, after a restless night, he wandered alone into the forest—to think things out. His supposed disease had gained him a measure of freedom to come and go as he chose. Miss Ward had been permanently installed in the two-roomed house hitherto occupied by Darling. The tool-house had been roughly put in order, and Ursola had elected to sleep there. Mr. Govan, Charlie Darling, Timms, and the two sailors, all occupied the speak-house, an almost disused institution (walled with some kind of canes) which had served as the village council-house in the days when that village was populous and energetic. In the ordinary course of things, Grant would have slept with them. But his supposed disorder had given him a perfect excuse for avoiding this. Instead, he had withdrawn to the native house where the trader had killed his wife. He had first seen it when he went to awaken Ursola—to tell her of Miss Ward's preservation.

The path which led to the hill was sprinkled with coral sand. Then it was paved with warm red earth sprinkled with brown leaves. At first it was sparsely bordered by sloping palm-trees. Then the palm-trees grew closer and locked above and around it. Then it

grew somewhat rocky, with great damp tree ferns overhanging it. Then it passed by a deep pool fed from twenty feet above by a waterfall. It ended at the crest of the hill, and then there was a smooth plateau. There were groves of orange-trees upon it, of which the dark leaves contrasted well with the yellow fruit.

Here he might have enjoyed that "rare view of the sea" which Charlie Darling had urged him to behold had his attention not been at once attracted by a small wooden building that lay beyond the orange-trees. It stood below the highest point of the hill. It was buried in a tangle of vines, but a wealth of crimson flowers was poured about its foundations. The door hung upon a single hinge, and the window—a small unglazed window—was almost hidden by leaves. It was square-shaped and low in the roof, which was thatched with pandanu-leaves. Plainly, it was quite deserted.

He grew interested then in this deserted house, sheltered behind by the very crest of the hill and in front by the dark-leaved grove. He inspected it very carefully—with apparently unnecessary thoroughness. But a fascinating idea had struck him, which, in the amazing serenity that was born of his pride, he was seriously inclined to attribute to a partial Providence. It had come to him like an inspiration that here was the ideal house for Ursula and himself to inhabit—after they were married, after the ship had called, and the island was cleared of Mr. Govan and Miss Ward and the others—and at once his uneasiness had been banished and confidence had come to him once more.

Full of this confidence, he returned buoyantly to the village. Of course his plan would be successful! The worst of its execution was over. He had told Miss Ward and Mr. Govan that he had cancer. And neither had

dreamed of disbelieving him. In spite of Mr. Govan's ridiculous resolutions about "getting off the island at once" and "beating Fate," nothing of that sort was possible. Darling had been fifteen years upon the island, and he said that there would be no ship for seven months. And Darling was bound to be right, too. No. Immediate escape was impossible.

So Mr. Govan was welcome to look for a means of escape. It would take up his time, merely. It would keep him from troubling about Ursola, from suspecting the secret concerning her. Grant knew no more about cancer than the average man in the street. But he knew quite certainly that its cure was difficult, and that any cure became impossible if it were not treated in its very earliest stages. When it had run a supposed course for more than seven months even Mr. Govan would be daunted; he could hardly have the optimism to suggest a doctor by then. Grant would plead, as he had already done, how painful the voyage with Miss Ward would be. And thus he would be left alone, for at least another seven months, with Ursola. And they would neither be troubled with Darling nor involved in the life of the village. Secure upon the hill, they would have peace. Indeed, they would dominate the village.

It was characteristic enough of Grant that he could not restrain his impatience. The house on the hill wanted patching and clearing, and he could not rest till he had actually started to do this. By cautious inquiries he found out from Charlie Darling that the house was indeed deserted. For it had been built by the dead trader, overlooking his favourite orange-groves. And for the five years since his suicide no one had troubled to meddle with it. So, again reassured by this, Grant managed to annex an axe and a quantity of strong twine,

both of which came to light in the process of renovating the tool-house. And then a fresh inspiration came to him. Somehow he must meet Ursula, and for obvious reasons he dared not do this publicly. So he arranged that she should meet him the following evening by their future home, the house that was to contain their love. Nothing, thought Grant, could be more delightful than that.

He was by this time thoroughly himself again, very self-confident and authoritative, protective. Mr. Govan had been active but unobtrusive throughout the whole day. Miss Ward had kept to the house; probably her heart was breaking. Mr. Govan, of course, had been exploring, looking for the weapons with which to fight Fate—but he had not found them. Mr. Govan was not reticent, so had he found them he would certainly have told everyone.

And then the very next day Grant received his first shock.

When he had first recovered consciousness he had become aware of one particular native apart from the rest. He had noticed at once his strong, imaginative face, with its fiery, thoughtful eyes and its tuft of white beard. He had vaguely wondered at the time if this were perhaps some savage king, and he had even meant to ask about him, but had afterwards forgotten. Yet the true explanation of his presence there was not that. Grant accidentally discovered that his name was Koro, and that he was not, properly speaking, a native, since he came from Samoa. He was a wandering minstrel, a savage poet, as it were, though his poems were never written down.

That he could speak English of a kind Grant also discovered, for early in the evening he came upon Mr.

Govan engaging Koro in earnest talk, assisted by a great deal of explanatory gesture. And as it was quite certain that Mr. Govan knew not a word of Samoan, this proved that the basis of communication must have been English—or at least some European language. Grant considered his discovery remarkable only because it supported the conviction he was slowly forming about Mr. Govan; that the latter would have attempted conversation with an idol when other listeners were exhausted. And, indeed, Grant had no reason to suppose that the discussion could have any possible significance to himself.

His assumption shows the folly of undervaluing the importance of little things.

Half an hour afterwards, as Grant was getting ready to keep his appointment with Ursola, Mr. Govan sought him out triumphantly, and at Mr. Govan's opening platitudes to the effect that "some heathens were just Christians at the bottom—kind and helpful at heart, staves to lean upon in the time of need," he knew instinctively that something had turned up that was likely to interfere with his plans. Mr. Govan paused—apparently to allow time for the profundity of his teaching to sink in. Then :

"The first step, John," he said, in a tone that was meant to be encouraging.

Grant waited in a state of mind that varied between fascination and suspense.

"There's an island," Mr. Govan at length brought out—"there's an island just thirty miles from here. It's owned by an American, a writer of plays, who lives on it. And he has a small steam-yacht. A little bird told Mr. Govan about it. A little heathen bird—to whom he has just been talking. . . ."

Koro, it would seem, had livelier wits than Charlie Darling.

Grant's temperament—a very happy temperament if only it had been coupled with sincerity—was such that he was always able to live only for the moment, provided that moment was sufficiently exciting. So it was with less abstraction than might otherwise have been expected that he set out to meet Ursola. Consideration of Mr. Govan's discovery filled him with dismay and uneasiness. So, for the moment, he obstinately refused to consider it; he would look no farther ahead than the anticipated pleasure of the evening.

He took the path for the hill, and came at last to the plateau. A great round moon was hanging over the sea, as he turned to look down upon the island. The lagoon lay like a mirror, and beyond the lagoon, beyond the barrier reef, the little waves twinkled like polished silver. The whole island seemed asleep, too. And the moonlight was something tangible—like a shining mist.

From the plateau beyond the path a figure advanced upon Grant. It came through that mist of moonlight like incarnate moonlight itself—but he did not hear it coming. It hesitated adoringly behind him. Perhaps he felt its presence, or perhaps a faint whisper born of extreme desire reached him. At any rate, he turned suddenly. A second later he held that figure in his arms.

"Ursola," he said passionately. "It seems weeks since I saw you. Do you know that, I say? It seems weeks since I saw you."

"It seems so long to me," she replied. "It seems so long. So very, very long." She sobbed a little. "Oh, must we go on pretending? I hate pretending like this. I want to be like other girls. To—to love openly."

Fear mastered his desire for a minute. There must

be no question of loving openly as yet. She must be made to feel that.

"No, Ursola," he said. "We—we dare not do that."

She sighed at this, and drew away from him :

"I know. That is, I know it in here." She touched her head. "With my reason, you know—which is all yours. But my heart . . ."

"It would spoil our lives if she heard. I—I might be taken away from you."

And at this she sighed again—and shivered.

He took her to the wooden house, and they sat down upon the doorstep. To console her—and himself—he told her eagerly of the many plans he had been making, of the use to which they would some day put that house. He reassured her—and himself—by speaking of months as though they were only minutes. And in the end he became enthusiastic. He believed for the time in the infallibility of his own prophecies.

- Presently her face brightened.

"Let us start, then, and work at our home," she said sedately as she rose. "It makes me feel as though our marriage-day were nearer."

He was enchanted by this.

He rose too. He fumbled in the flowers at the foot of the door; and presently he produced the axe and a length of the strong twine. He gave the latter to Ursola, directing her to fasten the thatch, which was gradually going to pieces. He started upon the vines with the axe. The left wall of the house was less encumbered than the right, for that was the wall which was most exposed to the wind. So to-night he started upon the right wall, for his exalted mood would be satisfied only by the strenuous.

They worked for almost an hour, and hardly ex-

changed a word. They might have been paid labourers, so matter of fact was their behaviour. But in a sense, of course, they were something less than labourers : they were instruments merely, instruments in the grip of a world-old force that was driving them to build a house as it drove the birds to nest. It was a desperately primitive situation—but anything connected with love is always desperately primitive. They were at least no more primitive than the most modern of affianced lovers who go out hunting together—for the ideal flat in Kensington. Both were satisfying an instinct. Only their means differed.

At the end of an hour Grant stood back from his work.

"Enough for to-night," he decided. "And besides—I must go soon."

"I am not tired," she declared. "I could easily go on."

But all the same she did not go on. She finished the knot she was tying. And then she went over to Grant, and stood silently beside him.

There was a pause. A green dove, startled by something it had heard, shot from a tree like a stone, brushed their faces with its wings—and was gone. From the other side of the hill came a steady insistent murmur. It was the noise of the sea breaking at the foot of the cliffs, for it never was calm there.

Suddenly—quite unaccountably—Grant's spirits fell.

"No," said he, somewhat bitterly. "There is no use in going on. There is hardly a fortnight's work here. And we have seven months in which to finish it."

An hour before, she had been dismayed by the same fact. But now, with perfect feminine inconsequence, she was able to console him.

"Seven months will pass," she whispered, placing a hand in his arm.

"Yes," he assented; "but there is so much for me to do before that, so much for me to—face." His expression grew dark, and he went on, partly to himself: "Mr. Govan has found out an island with a boat, too. It's thirty miles from here, but the man who lives on it has a yacht."

She began to tremble with eagerness:

"Then it may be less than seven months?"

"Yes," he replied, "if he could get to that island from here. But he can't get! There's no boat here, and he can't expect us to swim his thirty miles. He can't expect that, I say—" He broke off with sudden caution as he saw how puzzled he was making her. "Ah, never mind, Ursola!" he concluded. "Never mind. He—he shan't—can't get a boat here, so it will still be seven months. But what are seven months? When I have you . . . like this. . . ."

He slowly took her in his arms. She suffered him for a full minute, and then drew back—as though something had startled her.

## II

He let her return to the village alone, for they were both quite certain that it was more prudent to return singly. There was no one on that island to molest her. She was safer alone at night there than she would have been in the streets of an English town. He waited till she was out of sight, guarded her jealously with his eyes till the palm-trees swallowed her up. Then he concealed the axe and the twine in the flowers at the threshold of the house.

A spirit of foreboding, a distinctly ominous spirit, was upon him once again, and he tried to banish it by gazing at the lonely island surrounded by a desert of water

which lay like a map beneath him. But the spirit refused to be banished. Again and again he told himself that his fears were groundless, that thirty miles of water was as insuperable a barrier as a hundred—but he told himself so in vain. The fact was, he was conceiving a fear, an almost superstitious fear, of Mr. Govan. Thirty or a hundred miles, it made little difference, perhaps, to the actual state of affairs. Yet Mr. Govan had achieved the impossible; he had forged a link of the chain that was to bind Fate. One link was of little use—that was true, of course. But it was the moral victory Grant grudged Mr. Govan.

He felt dimly that Darling had treated him badly, for Darling must have known of that miserable steam-yacht, which somehow upset him so, despite all the platitudes he could bring to bear upon the subject. He felt, too, an unreasonable impotence before Mr. Govan's will—not the impotence which arises from lack of means, but rather that which arises from lack of initiative to use them. Perhaps fascination is a better way of describing it. You could easily have compared him to a bird fascinated by a snake, logically free to rebel, yet quite illogically passive. Or he might have been beaten so often by Mr. Govan that he felt the futility of striving with him. Or he might have been very tired, too tired to go on. Anyway, nothing better illustrates the significance of the change he was undergoing than his present attitude to Mr. Govan. He wished (vindictively almost) that the latter had never been saved—and his conscience did not reproach him!

In the end he, too, started to go back to the village.

He passed indifferently through the forest, was on the point (still indifferently) of skirting the village to his quarters, but he noticed a light through the trellised walls

of the speak-house, so he turned cautiously aside till he reached it, and peered through the spaces in the canes. Mr. Govan had contrived a feeble lamp of a sort, and he was studying a tattered chart which he had evidently unearthed from somewhere. There was something ferocious, something profoundly unsettling about the activity of the man. The sweat beaded Grant's forehead in little drops. He walked agitatedly away, clenching his fists tightly and scowling ominously.

His feet brought him to the lagoon, and he brooded heavily over it, a prey to pride and apprehension. A great fish splashing suddenly by the reef broke his sombre reverie. Raging with a dull, increasing anger, he went slowly to his quarters. That anger was like an ache.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONSEQUENCE OF MR. GOVAN'S CONCERN

#### I

THE next morning his anger still persisted, but the rest of his emotions had all died away. That was so much to the good. He rose early and strolled on the smooth white sand. A thick mist—very uncommon in these parts—was smoking up from the sea and stealing imperceptibly upon the island. The rising sun was hidden.

The sand was pierced at irregular intervals by pillars and fragments of rock. These grey, uneven rocks made favourite perches for the great white sea-birds which circled the beach by day. And they resembled, too, a petrified army of scarred and scattered adventurers. It is easy to imagine Grant's feelings—for his nerves were badly on edge—when what was apparently one of the most typical examples of the rocks started to move suddenly.

A second later he was inwardly sneering at his puerility. The figure was that of Miss Ward. She was slowly advancing towards him. She must have been standing motionless like one of those silent rocks, and must have moved the moment she perceived him. His first impulse was to avoid her—till discretion prompted him to the contrary. A plea of extreme sensibility was all very well, but it was better to take no risks. A woman who loved him as she did might easily suspect if he shunned her. So he made up his mind he would speak

to her. For he must fix her in the belief that he was suffering as strongly as she, because of their broken engagement.

So he in his turn advanced till he stood silently before her. Falling into his part :

"If you'd rather I should go," he murmured.

But she shook her head :

"Go? There is no need for that. Oh, no, no! We are not—children."

She began to move on at this. He fell into step beside her, for she seemed to expect him to accompany her.

His lips were tight and secretive, and he stedfastly looked at the ground. But she, too, was studiously avoiding his eyes, so he furtively glanced at her face. For the past three days he had scarcely seen her at all, and these three days had worked a tremendous difference in her appearance. She was paler and thinner than ever, and her eyes were ringed and sunken. He contrasted her unfavourably with Ursola's fresh simplicity. And he marvelled more than ever that he could ever have contemplated marrying her.

A stab of pity hurt him as he thought of her arid future. At least, he supposed it was pity. But, more properly, it came from his own vanity. He knew how she loved him, and he could easily imagine how terrible it must be for anyone to lose him for ever. The next minute he dismissed this dubious pity. She was rich, he remembered suddenly. Money would compensate her for everything.

"Money," she said quietly. He started at that, for it almost seemed like thought-reading. "Money. Yes, money is bound to help."

"I suppose it does," he assented.

Then he remembered that she still believed him to be rich. He quickly covered his slip :

"I—I know it does, of course. It helps. But it does not heal." He hesitated for a moment. Then he added : "You see what I mean ? You feel that, too, no doubt."

"Oh yes, I feel that too." She looked at him steadily for an instant. Then : "Suppose Mr. Govan succeeds ?" she went on. "I—I dare not believe it yet, of course. But suppose he should succeed ? He's succeeded so far, hasn't he ? He's found out about this nearer island—with the steam-yacht. Do you think he can find a way of reaching it ?" Her voice trembled with excitement. "Do you think he will ever do that ? Your cancer would be cured then, wouldn't it ? It would be taken in time ?"

"Yes. It would be cured then, I expect."

She sighed. Her sudden animation died away as quickly as it had come.

"I should like to wear mourning," she said dully. "Black. Black for the rest of my life."

He was genuinely touched at this fresh proof of her devotion. She was breaking her heart for love of him. He could not but respect a woman who showed such extreme taste. He determined to say something generous. He would do the thing handsomely, as it were—and so he proceeded to comfort her with words well chosen, words that would console her for the loss of him.

"Beatrice," he said earnestly, "if Mr. Govan could find a way, nothing would keep me from marrying you. But it would be wrong to pretend that he is likely to find a way. I can only counsel you to resignation."

"You love me ?" she cried urgently. "You are perfectly sure that you love me ?" She broke off with a little gesture : "But of course you love me."

The words stuck in his throat, but he very neatly managed to turn his reply.

"Think how you love me," he said. "Very well, then—like that."

He had been suiting his pace to hers. A minute before she had turned, and they were now reapproaching the village. She was staring intently through the mist, and he thought she was lost in a reverie, till he followed the line of her glance. But at that minute he became extremely alert, for Mr. Govan was advancing to meet them—in a very unusual fashion—and Mr. Govan was accompanied by Ursola.

Mr. Govan was more miracle than man. He had ferreted out a white drill suit belonging to the dead trader, and though this was a symptom of his energy, it was not an amazing symptom; Grant himself might have done the same in time. But he must also have discovered razors—and a hairdresser, and a bathroom, and a means for contracting and expanding his figure. At least, he was perfectly shaved. And his nails were undeniably scrubbed. And his suit fitted him as though it had been tailored to his measure. Yet Grant had already noted these phenomena. It was something else that now astonished him so much.

Mr. Govan was actually running! He, whose habitual method of progress was a firm, deliberate walk, was undoubtedly running—or galloping, perhaps, is the better way of describing it. The firm sand thundered beneath his feet. He panted exceedingly, and his expression, though strained, was triumphant. There was positively something awe-inspiring about the sight of him. It was as if the inevitable climax of a Greek tragedy had been amazingly and prematurely hastened by quick French technique. It was bewildering, too.

He literally rushed upon Miss Ward and Grant, grasping them joyously by the hands and muttering something incoherent about "his two happy young people once more."

"Ah, what?" began Miss Ward.

Grant was tensely silent.

"The Lord has been very kind," said Mr. Govan. Then he stopped for breath. "No," he concluded slowly, "I must break it gently to you both."

At this moment Ursola joined the group. She was flushed with the effort of trying to keep pace with Mr. Govan, and she looked more than ever like a child—for her hair was hanging to her shoulders. Days previously, indeed, Henderson had guessed that she was only sixteen. Shipwreck and a lonely island—she accepted them both as they came, and perhaps she comprehended their significance as little as a real child, led by its guardian's hand through the perils of a city street, comprehends the significance of the traffic.

"What," said Grant nervously, "must you break gently to us both, Mr. Govan?"

Mr. Govan smiled mysteriously, in a manner that was intended to be facetious.

"Now, what do you think?" he parried.

But at this Grant's temper, strained to the utmost, gave way. He burst out quite hysterically:

"I don't know. It's a shame to keep us in—in suspense. . . . I don't want to hear."

Mr. Govan studied him sadly—with the grave, reproving air of a father.

"If you don't want to hear, John," he announced, "Beatrice may want to hear. And there's this little stranger"—he laid his hand upon Ursola in a way that enraged Grant—"this lone little stranger who is far

away from her own. She may want to hear, John—for the same reason as yourself."

He allowed about fifteen seconds for his reproof to sink thoroughly in. Then he went on in a benign and tolerant voice :

"There, there! Young blood's inclined to be impatient, eh? But old Mr. Govan understands. So prepare for joyous news.

"Joyous news?" cried Grant queerly—and he heard his voice as though it were the voice of a stranger.

"Joyous news," repeated Mr. Govan firmly. "The best of news for you both, John and Beatrice."

Before he had time to say more :

"Both?" put in Ursola fearfully, in a puzzled, anxious voice.

Mr. Govan slowly turned upon her, and he was obviously annoyed at the interruption.

"Little girls should be seen and not heard," he said, in a tone that strove desperately to be playful. "But—my news is the news that unquestionably these two can marry."

"But surely you know—" cried Ursola.

Then she broke off in dismay, for she had seen the despair that Grant's face was advertising.

"I have—nothing to say," she concluded. A sob was with difficulty repressed. "I am—sorry for speaking, Mr. Govan. I have nothing at all to say."

No one—save Grant—apparently noticed that sob.

Mr. Govan went on :

"You're early astir this morning, but Mr. Govan's been up earlier. He's been right across the island."

"Yes," muttered Grant forlornly.

"And what do you think he's discovered?"

He waited in triumphant silence, and then he announced his jealously guarded news :

"One of the ship's boats, the biggest of the boats, is half ashore on a rock. We'll save it to-morrow night, John. At low tide."

## II

At a quarter past eight that night Grant climbed the path to the hill—for he felt that he must see Ursula. It was significant of his state of mind that he gave never a thought to the fact that he had no appointment. He had passed an indescribable day, for his imagination had tortured him with the reproaches he had read in her glance—reproaches which, it is true, she had never uttered, but which his imagination, in consequence, had suggested all the more strongly. Hitherto the most outwardly correct of men, he was lost now to all sense of the conventions.

But his instinct had been correct; instinct had been more astute than reason. He found her on the plateau, as he had expected. He scarcely paused to marvel at her presence there, so certain had he been that they would meet. She, too, must have been expecting him, for, a small appealing figure, she was waiting at the head of the path.

"Ursula," he said, "I knew somehow you would be here. I felt it, I say. Did you think perhaps I would come? Did you?"

She hesitated. Then:

"Yes, I thought perhaps you would come," she murmured, without raising her eyes. "I—I hoped you might come."

The mist had again thickened with the approach of sunset. A great wave of elation flooded his entire being, washed away the last vestiges of his common sense. Then she looked him straight in the face, and her eyes

were honest, yet shining with a strange triumphant fire. He thrilled to the very core of his being. He caught his breath sharply. He felt as though he had been born again.

"Oh, thank you!" he cried in a low voice. "Thank you for being honest."

"Yes, I thought you might come," she repeated, as if she were speaking in a dream.

He waved an arm at the night.

"Last night there was a moon," he said. "Do you remember? But to-night there is no moon. It is very dark. And there is no one to spy on us, no one to bother and—spy on us but the stars. Stars? Even the stars can't see us, for the mist is growing thick. Let us sit down, Ursola. We cannot stand and talk."

Without a word more, he threaded his way into the friendly darkness, and she followed as though he were a magnet. They were both perfectly silent. It was as if they both knew of a destiny they had to fulfil, and knew it so well that mention of it between them was unnecessary. Right at the back of the house rose the sloping crest of the hill, and between this and the house was a clear space carpeted with fallen leaves. And here there was a log—a legacy, probably, from the time the house was built. She seated herself upon this log while he reclined upon the leaves—at her feet. And thus was the world-old situation of lovers established immediately.

She did not reproach him, as he had feared, but she was sad and pitifully anxious.

"What Mr. Govan said—it is true?" she whispered coldly.

But a mad mood was upon him, and he obstinately closed his eyes to the problem her question raised:

"Don't let us think of to-morrow. I am driven. You couldn't understand. And something is sure to turn up.

And, at any rate, we have to-night. So don't let us think of to-morrow."

She yielded to his mood.

They were both inspired, and words came to them like impressions. They spoke freely of those little personal fancies that mean so much. They were trying desperately to drown in the reality of the moment the thought of a future that might part them. He spoke to her of his life, and she told him more of the great wisdom of Sister Martina at the distant convent of the Immaculate Conception in Santos. And, more pleasurable still, she told him of how he had first impressed her—of how frightened she had been of him, of how she had wondered about what she should talk—"for a young man's heart is not like the heart of a girl." And then she spoke of the things she had done. And he told her of all the brave things he had—meant to do. And then, quite inconsequently, she told him shyly that she prayed for him twice a day. And then she spoke again of her restlessness, and hinted, half in a whisper, that she had been happy since she had known him.

A stab of foreboding pricked her bubble of happiness.

"You will never marry Miss—Miss Ward?" she entreated.

But again he would not be honest.

"Never, never!" he fervently assured her. "But of course I shall never marry her!"

He was quite reckless by now. . . .

The faint noises of the night and the ripple of the distant water were the only sounds that disturbed them. Very far below them the bosom of the water, darkly sparkling, rose and fell unevenly. With every breath they took they breathed the keen warm air, heady and intoxicating. The night was as inscrutable as their hearts. . . .

He took her hand in his, and she suffered him. A great silence fell upon them, and they became very still. He bent his head awkwardly and kissed her hand. Then, inflamed by her passivity, he kissed her bare arm above the wrist. She turned sharply from him, but she did not yet withdraw her hand. He heard her catch her breath, and, now she was in profile to him, he noticed the quick rise and fall of her breasts.

"Ursola," he stammered hoarsely.

She murmured a low, agitated reply, but he could not hear what she said.

"I'm very, very fond of you, Ursola," he went on rapidly. "I've been thinking of you day and night. You surely know how I love you."

The words sounded queerly fantastic the moment he had spoken them. In a distant sort of a way he wondered how he had ever managed to get them out. Something started up within him and told him he should rise and run. Yet something much stronger told him he should go on.

"Ursola," he said, "are you sure you really care for me? You—you don't mind? You don't . . ."

She withdrew her hand abruptly, and turned once more so as to face him. She bent slightly towards him.

"Oh, my dear," she said breathlessly, "I feel as though you were a little, little boy. I feel I should like to sing until you slept. I feel . . ."

Somehow or other she slipped down from the log into his arms. His arms closed about her, and her warm breast seemed moulded for his; it seemed to fill a great hungry void that was gaping in his heart. His lips found hers, and she gave him kiss for kiss with absolute unreserve. Time had become no more. A timeless ecstasy had begun.

Presently her voice came to him from far away, like the tired murmur of a trusting child :

"Oh, did I not tell you it would all be right in the end ? Our Blessed Lady——"

He kissed her passionately.

"My prayers have been answered, you see. And our future will be all happiness. Won't you take me in your arms again. . . ?"

He had released his right arm, and had slightly drawn back from her. His heart was pounding, louder, it seemed to him, than an engine. His breathing was short and quick, and the blood sang in his ears.

"We shall be married," she was saying, "at dawn. We must receive the Holy Communion——"

She broke off suddenly. Some dim foreboding must have come to her, for an interior struggle began to shake her.

"What . . ." she whispered, striving to hide her face.  
"Oh, no, no . . ."

Again she broke off, and tried pitifully to command herself, but a kiss dispersed the forces she was calling to her aid. At least, it unfairly shook her allegiance to those saving, protective forces.

And in Grant's heart, so queerly are we made up, a long protest was in progress—a logical persistent protest, though in his wild unreasoning mood he passionately refused to attend to it. His early career as a lecturer for the Probity League had taught him rather to enjoy scandals—to deplore the wickedness of the world, yet at the same time to be secretly thrilled by it all, and to enjoy such thrills from the superior platform of his own righteousness. And he knew well that he was now deliberately depriving himself of all hope of any such enjoyment in the future. He had brought himself

down to the level of those whom it had been his pleasure to condemn. He, the denouncer of all Catholics, was shamefully leading a Catholic into sin. . . .

"I think you had better go," she was saying.

"Listen, Ursola——"

"No."

"Listen, Ursola, Ursola——"

"No. Oh, *please* go! I—I do want you to go."

"But, Ursola——"

"Go," she whispered—very faintly now.

"You mean that?"

By way of answer she struggled blindly to her feet, and at this he, too, got up. He faced her for a little in the darkness, breathing heavily. A soft murmur from the flashing waves at the foot of the cliffs, and his breathing—these were the only sounds.

"Always—you have been the first to go," he said strangely.

She thought she understood what he meant; she started gladly to pass him.

As she came abreast of him he reached out an unsteady hand, which he rested lightly upon her shoulder. That hand shook her resolutions—pleaded more effectively than ever his words could have pleaded. He was now trembling violently, and he learned by his touch that she too was trembling; and this seemed astounding, as though the mortality of a goddess had suddenly and amazingly been revealed to him. Both their hearts were throbbing, too, and in the one flamed the fiery cross of battle and in the other rose up the tragic Cross of Calvary.

Abruptly he drew back his hand, and became unexpectedly boyish and despairing.

"Yes. Go, go," he muttered awkwardly.

There was a long pause.

"I—cannot," she at last said, with tears strong in her voice.

He took a step towards her.

"But you go," she entreated quickly.

He heard his voice as though it were the voice of another :

"I cannot go, either."

She began to sob quietly, and he found he could not stand that. He bit his lip fiercely, but irresolution still held him, so that he felt unable to leave her. Suddenly they both stirred, and at this each in a panic thought that the other was going. They stumbled hastily—into each other's arms. But Ursola still wept even as she yielded.

### III

Sleep that night brought him no rest. In the morning, as he went to breakfast he saw her—a slim, unobtrusive ghost, peering reproachfully and timidly from among the slanting trees. He could not find courage to go up to her, so he turned his head aside and clumsily pretended that he was not aware of her presence. Later, stung by attrition, he sent her a message.

He scribbled that message on a leaf torn from a sodden notebook. He besought her to meet him that night on the hill, and swore that he "could explain everything" if only she would come to him there. He sent the message by the hand of the garrulous Kaibuke, and never cautioned him to secrecy. And nothing other than this could better illustrate how reckless he had latterly become.

## IV

Later still—in the afternoon—Grant set out from the village. He was still badly shaken, but a resolution had most evidently been formed. For there was something defiant in his progress—something defiant and obstinate. He did not follow the path, but struck diagonally away from it, more to the east of the hill.

He knew the line he should take, for he had been there before that day. In the course of the morning Mr. Govan had insisted that Miss Ward and he should accompany him to see the reality of his discovery. The boat had come ashore some mile and a half to the east of the actual scene of the wreck. At this point of the coast-line the cliffs fell away abruptly, and the rocks went back from the shore to the reef, and the lagoon broadened out once more. The boat was insecurely wedged on the very rim of the reef; the wind must have swept it away before the ship struck, and the tide must have drifted it there. Or perhaps it was a strange boat blown from another ship. It did not matter to Grant. At any rate, it was a boat—a means of transit to civilisation and the exposure of all his deceit.

He had brooded over its existence while Mr. Govan fulsomely lauded it. Indeed, he had afterwards feared lest his true disposition might have been betrayed, since he was far too sick at heart to summon up a show of enthusiasm. But Mr. Govan was no psychologist; and besides, he had been entirely engrossed in expatiating upon how they would paddle across the lagoon at low water, and carry the boat across the reef, and then tow it ashore. And on the way back to the village he had been full of admiration of himself, and of cheerful, carefully detailed prophecies about Grant's happy future

with Miss Ward. Then he had left Grant in peace while he roused Charlie Darling to reluctant activity. In peace! The word was a mockery to Grant.

And then Grant had suddenly decided upon the clear course to pursue. He had leaped into action at once. The hot languorous afternoon had well begun by then, and he had cursed himself bitterly for his slowness at arriving at a decision. The boat was not high and dry; it was not even stranded in the lagoon. It was on the very edge of the reef. And a strong push would send it derelict upon the face of the ebbing tide.

It is extremely significant of his development that he had not to pause and consider. True, his conscience was never unreasonable, but a few weeks earlier he would have had to have stifled it with sophistries. But he had grown rather desperate since then, and in any case—there was no time for that. He must swim the lagoon and get rid of that awkward boat. Sophistries could come afterwards.

So now, as he went on this mission, he was emancipated from all his scruples. With a wilfulness that was nearly feminine, he had managed to shut his eyes and ears to everything that did not suit his immediate purpose. The best traditions demand that a would-be criminal shall slink and hang the head. But truth compels the admission that he showed no trace whatever of either of these symptoms, though a crime—no more and no less—was what he was just about to commit. On the contrary, once he was clear of the village he began positively to enjoy the exhilaration that the mere fact of action was giving him; he liked to feel he was circumventing Mr. Govan, for this enhanced his pride. He liked the novel sensation that for the moment his fate hung in the balance, dependent solely upon his wits. He would have

resented the intrusion of any rival interest just then—as one village entertainer resents the appearance of another on the same night.

As he neared the goal of his desires his pace unconsciously grew quicker. Soon he was almost running. He began to imagine he was pursued. Of course he was sweating steadily and his face smarted hotly where a rebounding twig had rapped it. And the air by the sea was cooler, so that, hot though he was, he shivered. Ever solicitous of his health, he started to wonder uneasily if the swimming of the lagoon would be bad for him. And then he came out upon the shore. And the boat was gone.

Yes. The boat was undoubtedly gone. Trembling with incredulous excitement, he gazed across the lagoon to where he had seen it last, but it was not there. He wondered dully for a moment if Mr. Govan could have been before him. Then the ebbing tide—that, and the light land-breeze blowing from the hill—gave him the real explanation. The boat had been insecurely wedged, he remembered, for he had counted upon this for his plan. The boat, then, had come with the tide, and the tide had carried it away. . . .

It relieved him from all need of action, of course, but at first he was unconscious of relief. He was quite unreasonably chagrined—like a child disappointed in its schemes. He sat upon a fallen tree, dropped his elbows on his knees, and buried his chin in his hands. Then realisation came to him very suddenly, and with an intense relief. He had got exactly what he wanted, and his hands were free from the guilt of it. . . .

Presently he returned to the village.

## CHAPTER V

### TRAGIC DISCOVERIES

#### I

THE glowing afternoon had faded by the time Grant got back. And supper had begun without him, for low water was about half-past ten, and Mr. Govan and his salving party intended to leave at ten. They might have gone sooner, but the moon would not rise until eleven. They were sitting under a palm-tree, the last palm ere the white sand began, and were cracking the rind of some bread-fruits, which had previously been baked like potatoes in the red-hot ash. And this detail Grant noticed with that curious sense of detail which is never so well developed as when great events are impending. Indeed, it was this solitary detail that obsessed him—as he broke from the grey darkness into the dully glowing circle that the red ashes were casting.

The meals partaken on the island were communal—in theory. But Ursola, Charlie Darling, and Timms ate in private when they could. To-night, Miss Ward, Mr. Govan, and the two sailors, were all who were present at supper. And Miss Ward was inclined to be irritable; she was very clearly racked by suspense. She was complaining in a low voice that “the uncertainty was worse than knowing they would never get away.” And Mr. Govan was soothing her with an exhibition of his divine comprehension :

“Well, now, Beatrice, Mr. Govan is not going to quar-

rel. I know exactly what you're feeling. I know what young people have to go through at times. But put your trust in the Lord and in His humble follower, Mr. Govan. It'll all come right. It'll all come right."

He eyed her with preposterous benevolence as he said these words. She seemed on the verge of replying, but at the last she changed her mind. She rose abruptly and quietly, but with a despairing gesture, and walked quickly away over the sand till she came to the edge of the lagoon. With her back to the fire, she stood there desperately passive—a barely discernible shadow that suggested much because it revealed so little. Mr. Govan gazed at her intently, then reluctantly turned to Grant with an exaggerated air of gravity.

"Ah, poor girl, poor girl!" he said, shaking his head pityingly. Then, in a hoarse stage whisper, with a sidelong glance at the sailors: "She's breaking her heart for you, John."

As this was a truism to Grant, he did not trouble to reply to it. Instead he sat down to supper, demolishing the bread-fruit with avidity, for he was suddenly very hungry. Mr. Govan studied him benevolently, with the air of a very kindly superintendent at the annual picnic of a cherished Sunday-school; he even muttered ridiculously that "he thanked the Lord one of his young people still kept up an appetite." At this nauseating remark the two sailors jumped up convulsively, and hurriedly withdrew from supper. So that Mr. Govan had the field to himself, and was able to stroll sentimentally directly behind Grant, where he brooded over him with a maddening air of proprietorship. His silent presence and his heavy, deliberate breathing affected Grant's nerves badly, and he felt he must scream in a minute. But Mr. Govan spoke in the end and relieved the tension.

"You haven't been to look at the boat?" he said.

Grant was swallowing at the instant, and his mouthful nearly choked him. The aptness of the question was uncanny, and for one horrid instant he feared Mr. Govan suspected him. But the next instant he knew that his fear was groundless. For what could Mr. Govan suspect? What *could* he suspect? Without turning his head, he mentioned as indifferently as he was able that he had been quite in the opposite direction—"for a walk." And after a second's anxiety he had the satisfaction of hearing Mr. Govan go on, with no mistrust:

"And there's nothing like a walk to give you a good appetite. You're right there, John. No mistake about that. The air . . . It's a wonderful gift of the Lord, a wonderful gift." He concluded, with a pleased chuckle: "You haven't learned to value it yet, I'm afraid—Beatrice and you. But you will. Oh yes, you will!"

All this, it must be remembered, was breathed into Grant's ear from behind. Grant could not see Mr. Govan; he could only hear his voice—with astonishing penetration, like a voice over the telephone. The effect of it all was hypnotic. He felt bewildered, spell-bound almost. For the life of him he could not rise. He had the absurd fancy that Mr. Govan would suddenly shout in his ear, like a child playing a trick. But yet he could not rise.

Presently Mr. Govan went on, with slow, meditative deliberation:

"Air! Atmosphere! It's a mysterious thing, atmosphere, but ether's even more so. We can't feel ether, and we can't taste it or see it. But it exists everywhere—even in the most perfect vacuum. And we can't account for certain phenomena without it."

Suddenly he chuckled again—quite inconsequentially.

"It takes more than a mere mishap to beat Mr. Govan," he said.

Grant was becoming impatient, and was about to say something sharp. But before he could do so :

"It's the basis of wireless telegraphy," said Mr. Govan, with an even wilder inconsequence.

"What?" said Grant, bewildered. "I beg your pardon?"

"Ether," continued Mr. Govan. "Wireless telegraphy's just waves in the ether. And, indeed, it is easy to produce these waves. And it's rather a speciality of mine. I've studied it at Poldhu, you know—in Cornwall." He paused for a moment, then concluded : "But you're not interested in wireless telegraphy, I expect? We must remedy that, John."

Grant replied somewhat brutally that he was not interested. The fact was, he had yawned rather ostentatiously, for boredom had broken the spell, and he was feeling himself once more. He rose deliberately and strolled in the direction of the village. Was Mr. Govan getting ready for brain-softening? It seemed probable. At any rate, his sequence of ideas was absolutely inexplicable. Well. He would not be so confident by the time he got back to the village. The boat was gone. He would change his tune when he discovered that for a fact. The village was already asleep as Grant strolled contemplatively through it.

Undoubtedly it was a still night. Overhead a great dome of spangled stars twinkled watchfully, and infinity as seen between them was very black. Night and a jewelled sky—and a great peace everywhere. These were the three great mysteries which the universe offered for contemplation. Contemplation is easier at night, for man and his works are muffled then. For a minute or

two Grant was drawn above himself as he gazed perplexedly at the night—at the dark heavens visible above the palm-trees. Eternity lay before him, and with quick wonder he realised for the first time in his life what a stupendous spectacle it was, this daily and nightly hint of the Infinite, to receive which men had but to raise their eyes from the ground. Yet men did not see it for the perpetual miracle it was; they were even familiar with it, and he supposed that the very fact of its ever-presence must have made them so. He thought queerly: "If I had been born blind, if no one had ever told me how the sky looked, if I had suddenly received my sight on a night like this—I expect I should feel exactly as I now should were God to appear to me." Nominally, Grant was completely indifferent to God. Certainly he did not believe in Him after the orthodox fashion. Yet now he was not so sure; were it not for the stars, he thought, infinity by night was a riddle which might well drive the wisest mad. The stars were finite objects which finite minds could grasp and thus preserve their sanity. And the stars were created, and pointed to a Creator. . . .

With an angry shiver, Grant brought himself back to earth; he was irritated with himself for what he mentally stigmatised as his "nonsense." He became aware of the two sailors who were to accompany Mr. Govan on his expedition. They were waiting at the beginning of the path, and he noticed that they had not the small canoe which was to have been a feature of the enterprise.

"Where's the canoe?" asked Grant, chiefly for something to say.

"Mr. Govan says as how he won't want it after all," said the younger of the sailors, after a moment's hesitation.

Well, that was true, thought Grant; it was more true

than Mr. Govan as yet imagined. But what a persevering sort of man he was! For reasons of his own, he evidently intended to swim the lagoon instead of rowing across it. Grant actually smiled when he remembered the discomfiture that was awaiting Mr. Govan. The practice of duplicity was developing his sense of humour.

He turned his back upon the sailors and looked towards the lagoon. By the pale starlight, he could see that Mr. Govan had joined Miss Ward on the shore. Mr. Govan was talking energetically, and unconnected fragments of his sentences floated to Grant intermittently. "Ether . . . just like light and heat . . . Waves . . . Very simple"—such were the phrases he caught.

Grant walked abruptly on, and presently he bit his lip and muttered an exclamation of annoyance. Mr. Govan was growing ridiculous. Brain-softening—that must be it. Or perhaps he was merely triumphant? Or possibly he meant to be funny? . . . Anyway, he would change his tune in a little, when he found that the boat was gone.

## II

Grant listened in the darkness till he knew from the sounds that Mr. Govan and the sailors had departed. Then he returned to the crumbling, dying embers of the fire—not for heat, but more from a sense of companionship. He was suffering from intense excitement (which he naturally had to suppress); he was feverishly rehearsing the astonishment and despair he must assume when Mr. Govan returned from his fruitless quest of the boat. However, he was to meet Ursola that night, so he would not see Mr. Govan until the following morning. Undoubtedly his sense of humour was improving, for he

positively relished the idea of shedding tears to Mr. Govan—when he had just returned from his stolen interview on the hill.

He stretched himself by the ashes of the fire, half reclining on his left side and resting his head upon his hand and his elbow upon the ground. That spangled night invested everything with romance, and the hushed mystery of the world seemed pregnant with a thousand suggestions. Grant's fancy, willing to roam luxuriously since his troubles were all over, eagerly caught at this chance discovery; everything was interesting when regarded from a certain standpoint. Full of his discovery, he at once proceeded to amuse himself with it, and at once was amazed at the quaint humour and odd pathos of mere inanimate trees and rocks. He was rapidly sinking into a mood of superior philosophic calm. But from this mood he was suddenly recalled by a phantom-like, dark figure which materialised into Miss Ward. Perhaps, he thought cynically, she already regarded him as hers. Well, there was many a slip. She would find her mistake in the morning.

She silently watched him, and he fancied her gaze was reproachful. She would find her mistake in the morning, but she must not find out from him. The effort it now cost him to speak to her tenderly was tremendous. But the game was nearly played, and the stakes were his. It was worth a final effort.

So he forced his expression to appear concerned.

"Won't you sit down?" he invited her.

But slowly she shook her head.

"The time for that has gone by," she told him. "It is now the time——" She broke off in unnecessary agitation: "Hush! Listen!"

He listened contemptuously enough, humouring her

whim as he might have humoured the whim of a child. Certainly the night was very black, and there was something unsettling in its quietude. But there were no unfamiliar sounds, only the plashing of the waves on the barrier reef and the thin wailing of a fractious child in the village. He sighed with suppressed impatience.

"I hear nothing," he replied.

She continued to listen for a moment. Then, very composedly :

"Dr. Henderson's . . . voice," she said.

And at this amazing statement Grant literally jumped.

"What do you mean?" he cried, half in anger.  
"Henderson's dead. You know that."

"Yes. I know that," she replied as before. "Yes. I know that. That's what I mean."

Grant pondered her for a second. But he soon gave her up, for she did not interest him. Women were quite incomprehensible. And, of course, she was in love with him; that would account for her oddity. But he remembered anew that she supposed him in love with her, and a man in love would not be supposed to be angry. He tried to nullify his anger by passing it off as a joke.

"Why," he exclaimed easily, "perhaps it's his ghost you hear."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" she asked.

He shook his head, impatient at her materialism.

"No, no. But it's the idea, of course. The idea of his influence remaining. A—a beautiful metaphor, don't you see—"

She cut him short.

"Then it's no use, I'm afraid—not to me. I'm tired of metaphors. I want something—something real."

"But, I think—"

Again she interrupted him.

"Is God a metaphor—will you say?"

"Of course not."

"Why of course not? You say: 'Of course not.' But others don't. Some say one thing, some another." She concluded very intently: "Then is hell a metaphor—will you say?"

He shivered.

"Yes," he told her, "Mr. Govan says that there's no hell."

She laughed somewhat mirthlessly:

"Then that settles the matter. What does Mr. Govan know about hell? How can anyone be sure?" She moistened her parted lips, then went on rapidly: "But suppose there is a hell? Certain things are necessary. There are certain things that have got to be done . . . got to be done." She paused, and concluded suddenly: "You love me? You love me, of course?"

"You ask me that constantly."

"Ask! No. I know . . . I have got to end—this day."

She turned abruptly on the words and receded into the darkness. This struck Grant as a somewhat dramatic way of stating the simple fact that you were intending to go to bed. But he did not consider it further—for he was not sufficiently interested. The moon had not yet risen, but the path to the hill was familiar to him, so he decided to start at once. Yet he was curiously reluctant that evening. Nearly an hour must have passed ere at last he set out.

That evening the path was oppressive, menaced and surrounded by the palm-trees, and Grant was unaccountably disturbed, so he sought relief in observation. Sudden grotesque shadows set him instinctively to imitate or to mimic them; random noises irresistibly

impelled him to weave stories about their origin; an unexpected glimpse of the stars again afforded him a glimpse of what lay behind them; and a startled bird intrigued him greatly till he had settled its kind and its destination—to his own satisfaction, of course. But the incident which thrilled him most was quite a trivial one. From a bend in the path, suddenly, the two sailors appeared, unconscious of his presence, and talking loudly but unrestrainedly in level, colourless voices.

"Do you think I'll ever forget?" said the one bitterly.

And the other answered—feelingly, with an equal bitterness:

"No. Never."

Grant drew back into the darkness, for he did not want to be seen. Mr. Govan must have forgotten something. He must have sent them back to fetch it.

What would they never forget? It was impossible for Grant to say, but a score of hinted possibilities at once offered themselves—sinister, or sad, or horrible, or tragic. The sailors were gone in an instant, swallowed up by the palpable shadows like poor wearied ghosts. There was nothing startling in their manner. Yet it would be impossible to overestimate the tremendous impression which the incident left upon Grant's mind. Perhaps he was morbid owing to the strain he had undergone; yet he never quite forgot the episode, and for long the exact tone in which the words had been spoken rang in his ears. There was something inexpressibly dreadful in the yearning bitterness of the question: "Do you think I'll ever forget?" It momentarily raised the curtain that veils the tragedy of life. . . .

He reached the plateau a little before ten, but there was no sign of Ursola, so he strolled towards the house. The house stood to the south of the plateau, with groves

of dark-leaved orange-trees clustering irregularly before it. He paused for an instant, as he always paused, to look down upon the night-bound island. But there was no view to-night. So with a murmur of impatience for the moon he turned away, and stepped from the shelter of the trees.

There his first surprise awaited him, for something tripped him, and he stumbled on his hands and knees upon the soft red earth. At once he was unreasonably angry—not on account of his tumble, which had scarcely scratched him. But he bitterly resented the presence of the foreign object which had evidently obtruded itself there. He was jealous of the whole plateau, as a man unconsciously is jealous of a strange building on a landscape which he knew as a child. He examined the thing that had tripped him, which turned out to be a coil of wire.

And then, as he rose in bewilderment to his feet, a second surprise awaited him. Hitherto he had been looking steadily at the ground, alert for fallen branches—but never for coils of wire! But it is the instinct of every man in perplexity to lift his eyes to the heavens; theologians will best know if this be a manifestation of a latent religious instinct. Grant raised his eyes, but they travelled no farther than the house. For the window of the house was a pale rectangle of light—the light that a dim lamp might give standing on the floor inside.

Grant passed a hand before his eyes, for he was utterly bewildered, and thought for a moment that his senses were playing him a trick. True, it occurred to him that Ursola might have anticipated him after all; but he dismissed this theory almost as soon as it came to him, for ordinarily there was no lamp in the house. Then he

quite gravely considered the theory of a ghost; but this, too, he dismissed, for the light, though desperately uncanny owing to the circumstances of its appearance, seemed uncompromisingly an earthly light. Stealthily he was drawn towards it—like a moth by a candle-flame. Again he neglected to look at the ground, and again he was brought to his hands and knees—this time by a heap of broken machinery. More astounded than ever, he dully rose to his feet and examined an object upon which his hand had unconsciously fastened as he fell. It was a bar of rusty iron; there were many such bars about. Gripping it—still unconsciously—he continued his progress to the house.

The house faced to the east, and the window, of course, was fixed in the northern wall. So Grant, who was coming from the north, was able to approach the window without passing the door. Instinctively, by this time he had crouched so low that the bar he was gripping actually trailed on the earth. And thus, as he cautiously lifted his eyes over the sill of the window, he saw the interior in slowly unfolding sections, as if it were the face of a canvas from which the covering was slowly being stripped downwards. And thus first the crown, and then an industrious eye, and then the short luxuriant moustache of a big, impassive head was revealed—the head of Mr. Govan.

In Grant's mind bewilderment at once gave way to utter consternation. He sprang back from that window, and had it not been for the soft earth his step must inevitably have betrayed him. But another minute found him at the window again. Light is a strange anodyne. Fear and surprise both are assuaged by the sight of the object that is causing them.

In a species of fascination—still gripping that bar of

iron—he stared intently at Mr. Govan. The latter was sitting in profile to Grant, with his back directly to the door, and he was bending over an improvised table and was working busily with some wire and a couple of huge jars. As Grant had supposed, the lamp was standing on the floor against the south-west corner of the wall; there was no reason whatever why it should not have been upon the table, except for the fact that the table was improvised, and that thus the added weight of the lamp might have proved too much for it. Mr. Govan's presence occurred just then to Grant only as a great impertinence. For Grant had by this time come to regard the house as his own particular property. He did not stop to remember that Mr. Govan knew nothing of this. Emotions come and go in utter defiance of logic.

But emotions are surprisingly affected by the mere physical attitude of the person who experiences them. If you fix a smile upon your face, for example, you will inevitably see humour in whatever was previously depressing. Grant was watching Mr. Govan without the latter's knowledge; he possessed information then which he did not share with Mr. Govan. And this bred unconsciously a condescending tolerance of Mr. Govan. His attitude at once grew playful—like that of an adult to a very precocious child.

And in a flash this passed. A great uneasiness succeeded it, and in a moment Grant was trembling, and his face had grown white and drawn. The wire and the iron outside were no longer inexplicable to him, for, of course, the sailors had brought them, together with the lamp and the stuff for improvising the table. But the reason why they had brought them, the reason why Mr. Govan had come there at all? He struggled with the

maddening problem, and then, in a moment, he had solved it.

Mr. Govan was contemplating the undertaking of a wireless telegraph. Grant did not know how he knew this, but he knew it intuitively—yet as surely as though he had been told. The broad hints Mr. Govan had thrown out at supper—these now seemed like a frank admission of the fact. And the fragments of speech he had caught while Mr. Govan was talking to Miss Ward—why, the man had been telling her then! Telling her! And he, Grant, had been blindly, egotistically impervious to the true explanation of the incident! And Mr. Govan's mention of the boat—why, he had never gone near the boat, had never intended to go! He had obviously known it was lost. Or perhaps he had decided that it would not be safe to use it. Tricked, tricked! That was the word that kept spinning in Grant's brain. Mr. Govan had tricked him. Of course, Mr. Govan had tricked him! . . .

At that moment Mr. Govan seemed to Grant like the incarnation of an implacable Fate that was trying to thwart his desires.

### III

Temptation is a queer thing. It enters subconsciousness quietly, and is thus never suspected. Like a clever conjuring trick from the repertory of an Indian juggler, it swells abominably from an insignificant harmless drop to a turbulent insurgent flood. Then it bursts into consciousness and often overwhelms it.

As Grant stood by the window, stunned by his sudden conviction (which had struck his intellect like a blow), a conviction which was absolutely without verification, but which was none the feebler for that, he was aware of no

mental processes. His intellect reeled from the shock. He mentally told himself that Mr. Govan had intended to spring this upon him as a pleasant surprise—in the morning, no doubt. But he did this quite by the way. Mr. Govan latterly had been obsessing him—possessing him almost, as though Mr. Govan were a spirit—so he did not pause to consider whether or not Mr. Govan's project were even remotely feasible. He believed in that gentleman's dismal powers of persistence; he had grown to regard him as invincible. And he saw his marriage with Miss Ward as though it were an awful pit to the lip of which Mr. Govan was masterfully steering him, paralysed and powerless to protest. And he knew that he never would protest. For his will grew helpless when it was brought to front Mr. Govan's. It was fixed ineradicably in his mind that a premature deliverance from the island meant ruin, meant marriage with Miss Ward.

These were his sensations at one moment.

A moment later he was crouching on the warm earth, gripping his bar of iron, which had suddenly become a weapon. He thought with perfect straightforwardness: "How simple it would be to kill him from behind with this!" Some dim, obscure part of him was protesting violently against the entertainment of the idea, but he did not trouble to attend to it—for, of course, he was not in earnest. He was merely speculating in idleness. . . . He would glance once more at Mr. Govan, steal round the angle of the house, cautiously open the door, and then— Well, a quick downward blow would be the obvious thing to follow. He realised with a start that justice was at a discount on that island, that savage conventions held good—and right and wrong are so frequently regarded as conventions. He realised,

too, that Mr. Govan was quite irrepressible, that nothing but death would ever cut short his activities. Imagine, he told himself, a man with but a few materials undertaking a wireless telegraph—and succeeding—oh yes, succeeding; Mr. Govan was certain to succeed. Absurd! Wicked! Damnable! Worthy of a violent death! . . . He rose to his feet suddenly, and peered once again through the window.

In those pregnant minutes Grant had changed from a coward to a criminal. He would not admit his intention. But rapidly he commenced to plan. He glanced quickly about him; the darkness seemed to bless his undertaking, to promise it a safe accomplishment. He drew a long breath. He tightened his grip upon the bar.

Mr. Govan was engrossed with his task. Grant remembered Henderson's description. "A clever engineer," he had called him. Well, that was true. Mr. Govan was too clever. Enough for the time of Mr. Govan; the door was the vital thing. Grant shifted his gaze to the door—the door through which he would enter.

The door was hanging by a single hinge. The air was stagnant to-night, yet undoubtedly the door was trembling. The trembling was hardly perceptible, and at another time it would never have been perceptible to Grant. Yet to-night the door was of crucial importance to his purpose, so he watched it fearfully. He had a queer presentiment that he would see himself entering presently.

He did not see himself—yet he did. The trembling grew more pronounced, and the door swung slowly inwards. Then the darkness outside trembled, and seemed to materialise slowly. A small, graceful foot delicately crossed the threshold.

It belonged to Miss Ward. She swung to the door

behind her. Grant was not in the least surprised to see her. He had surmised correctly that Mr. Govan had told her of his plan, and he thought merely that she was there in the capacity of his assistant. He noticed, too, that she carried a length of iron somewhat similar to his own, and he argued, reasonably enough, that Mr. Govan had obviously sent her to fetch it from the heap outside. Moreover, he was intensely relieved that she had entered exactly when she did, for had he gone—no, not to kill, but to reason with Mr. Govan forcibly; she must inevitably have found him out. But at the same time he was disappointed that he had been prevented from—from reasoning forcibly with Mr. Govan. Yet he waited passively enough, idly wondering why she did not speak.

For a second she, too, was passive. Then, like some preposterous marionette jerked into action by busy unseen strings, she lifted the bar of iron and poised it above her head. Grant was frozen on the instant. Great God-like things slipped by on the fringe of his consciousness, but one thing only was definite within his mind, and that a mere phrase: “rooted to the spot.” He thought and thought only: “Now I know what it means ‘to be rooted on the spot.’” Suddenly she smashed Mr. Govan’s head with an unexpected, crashing stroke.

That broke the spell which had bound Grant passive. He shrieked tremulously and hoarsely—an indescribable sound that can be represented only by “Hooh!” He had time to notice that Miss Ward dropped the bar, but he noticed no more, for he pushed himself away from that window and doubled frantically for the door round the angle of the house. Yet even as he ran he queerly thought: “I intended to do this with a similar purpose

to hers." He burst through the doorway quickly, and indignantly confronted Miss Ward.

She was standing like a woman in a trance. The bar lay at her feet. Mr. Govan was also at her feet, for the wretched table had collapsed and he had fallen crumpled on its ruins. She was staring interestedly at his head—a red, indescribable anomaly. There was an air of detachment about her that was peculiarly unnerving to Grant.

"I say," he stammered, "you've killed him." And then : " You've killed him, you know. You've killed him."

"Yes," she reluctantly said. "*For do you think I could ever have married you?*"

For the second time that night Grant passed a hand before his scandalised eyes. Horror, wild, incredulous horror, was creeping inevitably upon him, like a chill from an open grave. He felt suddenly as if the whole world had gone mad, as if he had passed through some horrible looking-glass into a world where everything was abominably perverted.

"I shall never understand," he murmured. "I don't—I shall never understand."

He stared at her almost piteously, but she did not offer to explain. So he said, for the silence was killing his reason :

"You don't mean to tell me——"

But here he broke off. The mistake would be too hideous.

Still with that air of a marionette, she was stirred into speech at last :

"I don't mean to tell you lies. No more. No. For I've told you enough."

He noticed that her air was different; her speech, too, for it was louder and less restrained.

"You love me, of course," she went on. "I can understand—I can forgive you that. But to think that I could love you. You!" She uttered an exclamation of disgust. "When I met you first of all on the boat I was poor and despairing. So I set myself to capture you. But not first," she whispered. "Oh, but not first!"

She studied him almost meditatively. He was too astounded to interrupt. She went on at last as before:

"My brother was sending me to New Zealand. I had fifteen pounds of my own. And a post as a companion awaited me. So I wanted to marry for money. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

"I would!" cried Grant. "I would!"

He wanted to say: "I did." But the words stuck in his throat—no longer through pride, but through shame.

"Then *don't blame!*" she screamed. "For what I have done I have done—do you hear? And what I have done I have paid for." She lowered her voice to a whisper: "Paid for."

She clasped her hands, unclasped them, clasped them again, and began to rub them agitatedly. She began to speak passionately in a quick, intense voice. The lamp in the corner flared and then died away to a gleam. Her outline was lost in the darkness. Only her voice was unconquered:

"I used you to meet Dr. Henderson, for I thought I would marry him. He wouldn't look at me. Wicked? Heartless? My God, I had to find some way of getting out of my misery! Yes, I turned to you then. What have men done for women that a woman shouldn't prey upon them? And I got you easily. Of course I saw that you loved me. But you thought that I loved you! It never crossed your mind that if I hadn't—been poor

and despairing—I'd have thrown away a glove that you'd touched. As it was I was greatly tempted . . . every time your eye caught mine. The price was almost too much. But I made up my mind to pay it. And then—I grew fond of Henderson. . . . I never knew his first name. But I still thought I could marry you—till the night you asked me to do it. Your first kiss, you remember? Yes. But do you remember how I shrunk from that?" Her voice rose to a wail. "I only learnt when you kissed me—that my love for Henderson was . . . undying."

With a faint, feeble hiss, the lamp finally expired. The darkness was absolute, was perfect, and her great sobs seemed literally to tear it like the plangent strains of some ghostly and deep-toned organ. Grant thought he must stifle. He plucked frantically at his throat. "Oh, God, oh, God!" he murmured. And the words seemed to arouse her.

"You will say," she went on brokenly, "that I did not tell you. But how could I tell the truth? You had made me say that I loved you. Humble? Confess? Do you think I'm the sort of woman—who humbles herself to you? To be sneered at by all the others? To be lectured by—Mr. Govan? Mr. Govan! He grew to be the torment of my life. You see—I had told lies to him, too. I told him I wanted to marry you, that I loved you. And he never left me—in peace. Forcing me to be married on board. Telling me constantly he would see that we really got married. I welcomed the shipwreck, I tell you! . . . If only I had not been saved." She drew a long breath. "But I was saved. I—woke up as they brought me across. I saw you were there, and I cursed you. . . . But I thought Mr. Govan was drowned. And then he turned up, and it began all over

again. And he spoke lightly about Henderson—and I couldn't stand it, but still my pride kept me back from the truth. Oh, pride's stronger than—love! And then you told me you had cancer—and I was glad. Glad—do you hear? And it would have ended the whole thing. If Mr. Govan . . . Mr. Govan . . . ”

She coughed harshly and returned to her old manner—to her quick, intense voice, which was still seemingly unconquered. The tide must by then have turned, for the roar of the waves on the cliffs was steadily increasing in volume. She heard, and she knew what it meant—as her next words proved :

“ That is the road the trader took when he found that Fate had cheated him. Wicked? Mad? My God, I would do the same, I tell you—if Fate were to cheat me! Ah! But I have cheated Fate. I have slain, not borne . . . my torment. Yes. You have seen me kill him. For his plans were driving me mad. It was bad enough when he found out that other island. And it was bad enough when he found out about the boat. But after—I had swum to the boat—and pushed it off—for I wanted to stay on the island till your cancer was past being cured—”

“ You did that? ” shouted Grant, with his afternoon’s work in his mind. Then : “ Oh, God, ” he muttered, “ I can’t bear this, you know.”

He discovered suddenly that—quite unreasonably—he was furiously angry with Miss Ward. Truly unconscious of this final stroke of hypocrisy :

“ Hypocrite! ” he declaimed hotly. “ Hypocrite! It’s—abominable. You’ve spoilt my whole life.”

“ Hypocrite? ” she said coolly. “ What, then? ”

“ And you—you glory in your hypocrisy, ” he stammered.

"It is at least something to remember I have carried it off successfully."

"Hypocrite and murderer. And you talk as if there was anything worse you could be!"

"Yes. For I have never deceived myself."

She paused for a second, and then she went on passionately :

"I might have pretended to myself that I was trying to do what was right. What did I want? A man to keep me. But I might have pretended I was looking for love. I might have thrown dust in my own eyes—by pretending in my heart that I really was in love with you. Yes. I know that I've been what it pleases you to call a hypocrite. But I've never been a Pharisee. Not that. Never."

It was so true that he had nothing whatever to say. He stood abjectly before her—but he scarcely saw her, for he was seeing himself instead. She was proud and unprincipled and unrepentant, and supremely indifferent to the truth. And he—was something worse, for he had prostituted truth for the sake of an easy conscience.

At this unbearable thought he started. He stumbled and fell—and his hand slipped in the darkness into Mr. Govan's blood.

"Spare! . . . Spare! . . ." he panted.

"No," she shouted back at him, "for you are a part of my torment. I have slain, not borne my torment. I shall kill—all my torment——"

"Then kill! Kill!" he demanded. He had scrambled at last to his feet. "Kill! Kill me too—and end my torment as well. I'm not rich. I never loved you, either. I wanted to marry money, I say—and afterwards pride kept me silent. And I never had cancer at all. And I wanted to stay on the island—for I

thought that you loved me, you see. Pride! Pride! Yes. Pride is stronger than—than anything. But I can't bear this—this horrible mistake that's happened. So kill me! Kill me, now!"

## IV

There was a dead silence in the house after she had spoken once. "Fate has cheated me," she said—then nothing more. Her voice was conquered at last; it trembled pitifully—like the voice of a disillusioned child. The moon was by this time rising, and a pallid twilight, like the dawn of a day in a nightmare, tentatively vied with the darkness.

If comprehension be born of death, Mr. Govan must now have been satisfied. For he had gratuitously set himself the task of bringing these two together—"his two happy young people"—and he had succeeded beyond his expectation. In that cold strange twilight each stared dumbly at the other, and their mutual understanding was complete. Yet they scarcely realised one another. For each to the other seemed a mirror—a terrible truthful mirror which showed them themselves as they were.

She stared frozenly at him for a full three minutes. Then, seeing he did not deny, she gave way, gestured despairingly, turned, and fled from the house as from the torture of a savage inquisition. Grant shouted a protest, and made after her with no definite purpose. Very soon, however, he stopped short in a stride. They had plumbed one another's souls. There was no more to be said between them.

So he loitered among the orange-groves, alone on that silent plateau which would always be silent now, which

seemed to proclaim his sin. Miss Ward had revolted him from his pride, but the lesson had come too late. For she had, after all, but anticipated him. Her punishment was also his own. His case was identical with hers. In what was he luckier than she?

From the path which led from the village an unconscious figure was advancing. He remembered his appointment with Ursola. She came like an answer to his question. He gratefully received this answer—with a deep humility in his heart. “I’m not worthy,” he murmured. “Yet if it should be Thy will I am ready.”

## V

He muttered something vague about “the road the trader took.”

“But I do not understand,” said Ursola.

“Now, God forbid that you should,” whispered Grant, “for that would be to know sin.”

“She killed . . . ?”

“She killed him.”

“Yet you say . . .”

“Ah, I am as guilty as she.”

She? Where was she? Suddenly he knew the truth. Yet he blindly hoped to be in time, so he caught Ursola by the hand. He hurried her down the hill, the southern slope of the hill. The air grew cooler and salter, and they stood at the top of the cliffs.

Somewhere a mountain-cock had awakened, scared by the noises of that night. Like a horrid travesty of Woolworth’s forgotten voice: “Mr. Deadly-Earnest Grant! Mr. Deadly-Earnest Grant!” its startled crowing seemed to have a message for Grant. The call mocked him sadly—and he was reminded of a phrase of

Henderson's. He had come through a door suddenly and had met unexpectedly with himself.

It was true. Somewhere at the foot of the cliffs that mangled counterpart of himself, that almost faithful counterpart whom he had thought about in life as "Miss Ward," was lying at the mercy of the sea. He murmured half to himself: "My mother was a woman of the people. My father was a wicked tailor. And I—but for the grace of God am there." And he stared in fascination at the cliffs.

That also was true, but Ursola did not understand. To her he had been always perfect. She pressed his hand—reassuringly.

*Exitus acta probat.*

June, 1917—February, 1918. A. M. D. G

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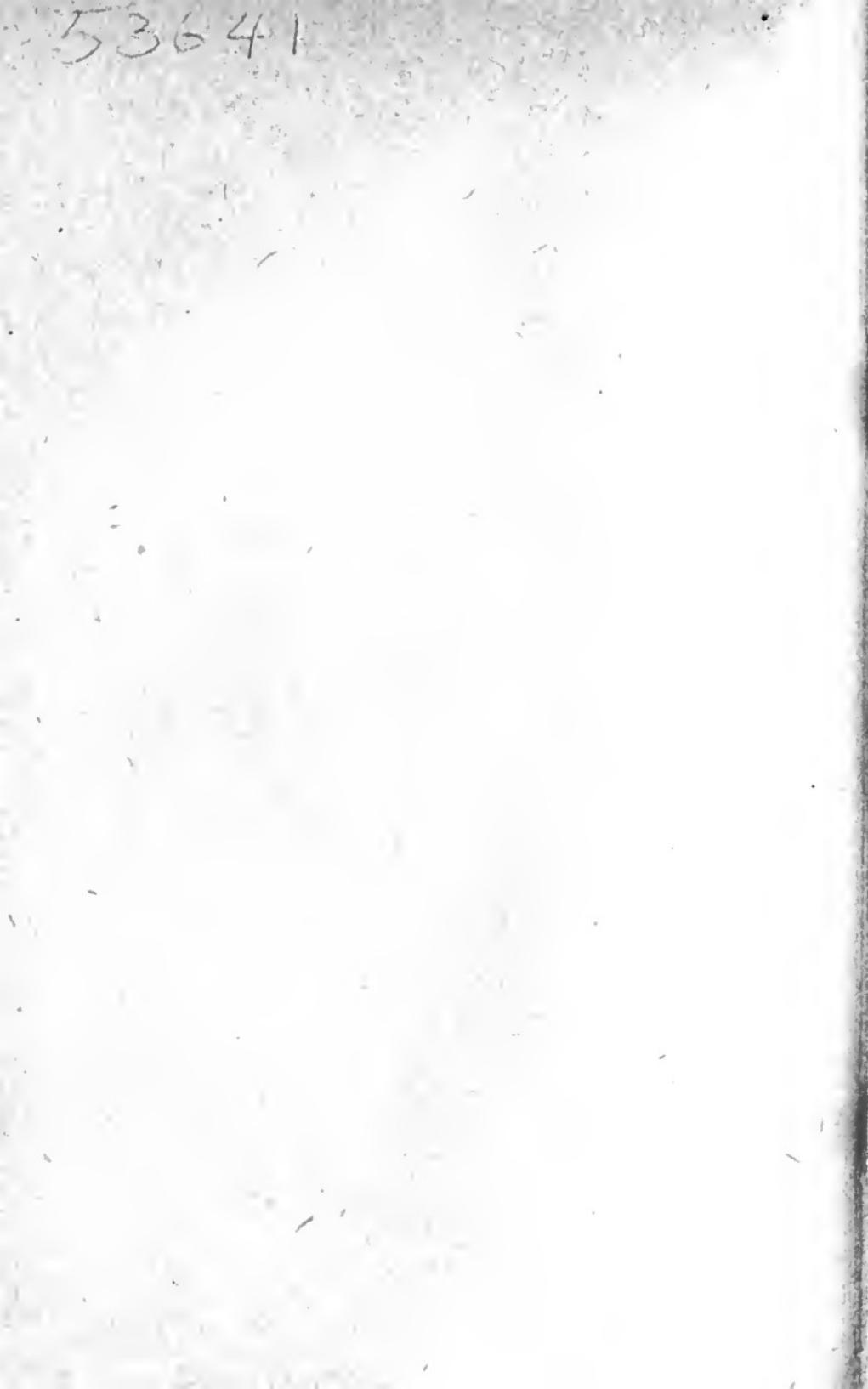
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